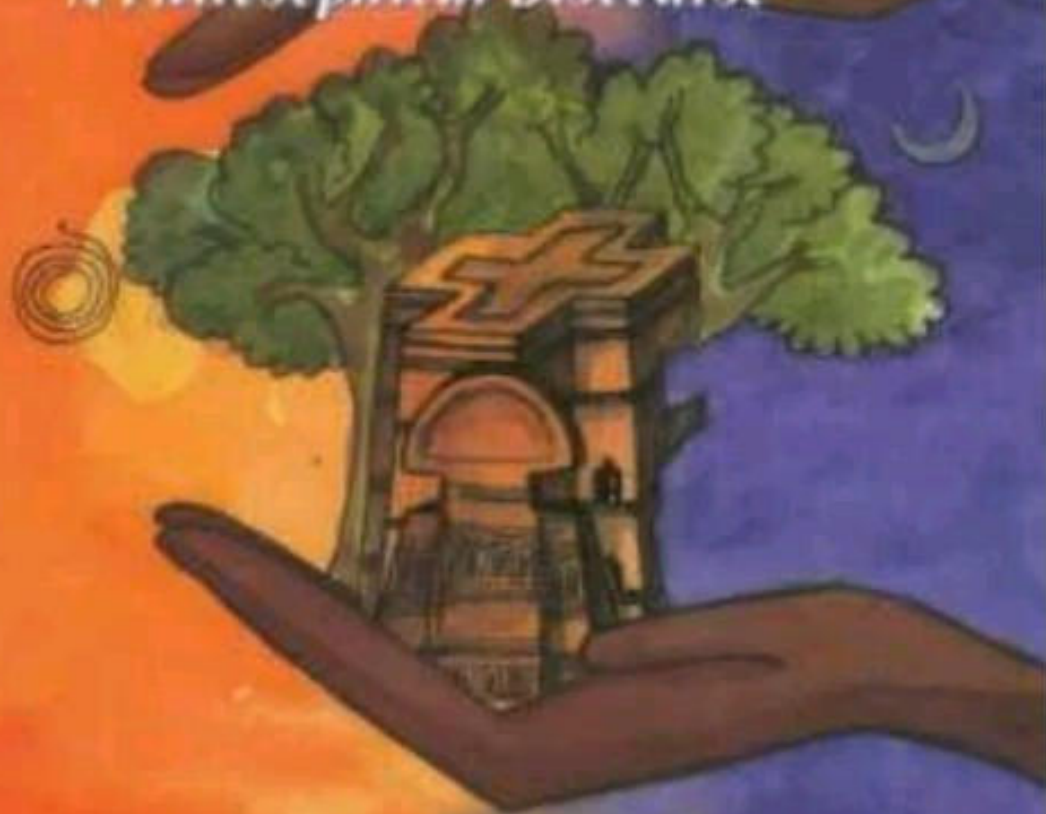


Survival and Modernization

*Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present:
A Philosophical Discourse*



Messay Hebede





SURVIVAL AND UNDER-ESTIMATION

SURVIVAL AND MODERNIZATION ETHIOPIA'S ENIGMATIC PRESENT:

A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

MESSAY KEBEDE



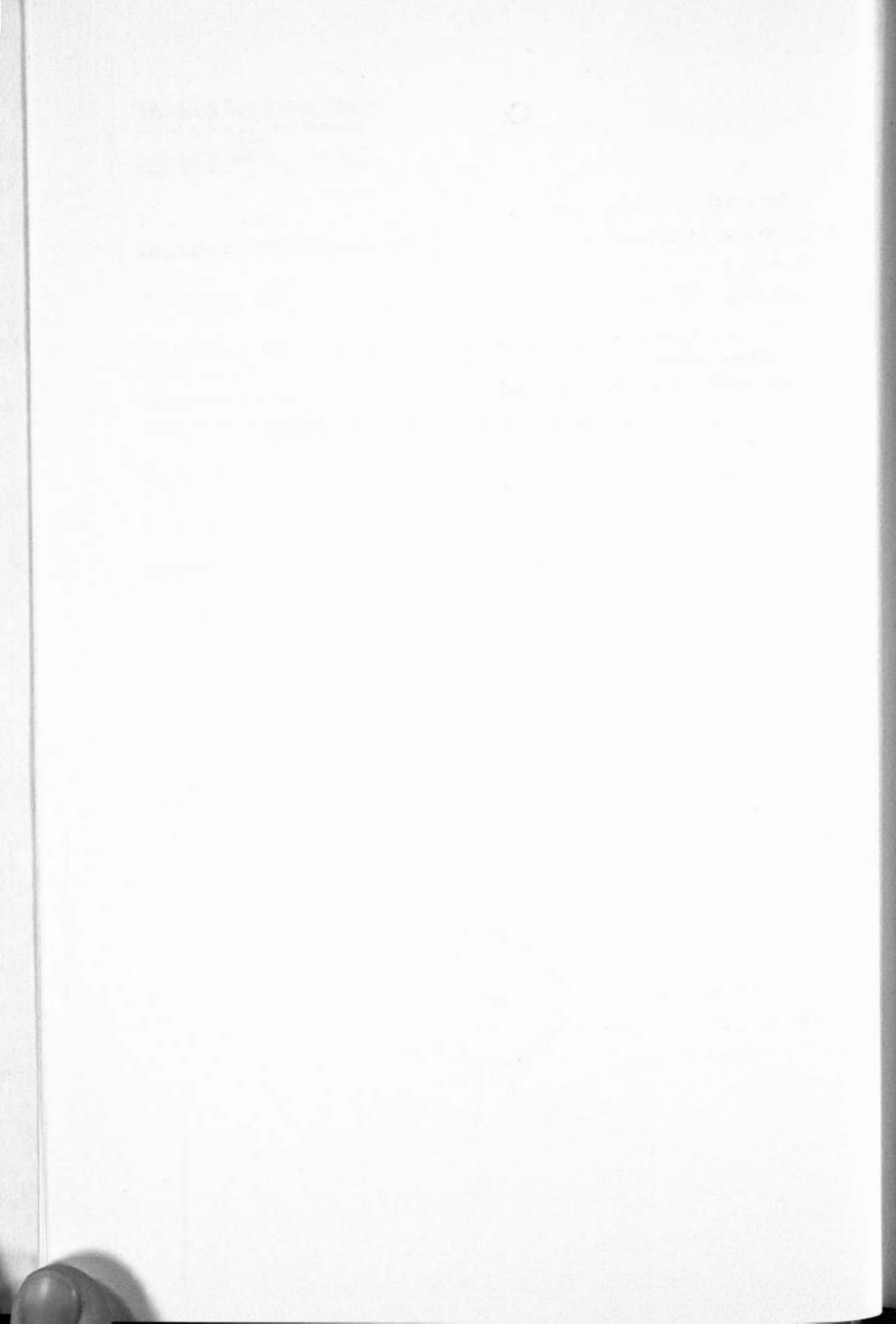
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SYNOPSIS

The following is a summary of the main points of the report. It is intended to provide a brief overview of the findings and conclusions of the study.

The study was conducted in order to determine the effect of the proposed changes on the overall performance of the system. The results of the study are as follows:

The first point to be noted is that the proposed changes have resulted in a significant improvement in the overall performance of the system. This is due to the fact that the changes have resulted in a more efficient use of resources.

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GLOSSARY

<i>Abuna</i>	Bishop, patriarch.
<i>Amhara</i>	The term refers to the Amhara people, one of the dominant nationalities of Ethiopia, residing mostly in the northern provinces of Begemder, Gojam, Wollo, and northern Shoa.
<i>Ayana</i>	Oromo word for fate.
<i>Balabat</i>	Originally owner of <i>rist</i> land. The term was extended to designate local leaders with land in the south.
<i>Bota</i>	Space.
<i>Chikola</i>	Haste, precipitation.
<i>Fitewrari</i>	Noble title.
<i>Gada system</i>	Oromo traditional social system.
<i>Gebar</i>	A payer of tribute.
<i>Gize</i>	Time.
<i>Gojjam</i>	Western Amhara region.
<i>Gondar</i>	Northwestern Amhara region.
<i>Gult</i>	The right of tribute appropriation granted by emperors to the warrior class.
<i>Gurage</i>	A minority ethnic group of southern Ethiopia and believed to be of Semitic origin.
<i>Harar</i>	A town situated in the eastern part of Ethiopia.
<i>Ichege</i>	The head of all monastic orders.
<i>Idil</i>	Chance, fate, fortune.
<i>Injera</i>	Ethiopian staple bread.
<i>Jimma</i>	A town situated in the southwestern part of Ethiopia.
<i>Legesna</i>	Generosity.
<i>Lij</i>	Literally "child." It was used as honorific title given to sons of the royal family and upper nobility.
<i>Maqwanent</i>	Nobles.
<i>Messakiya</i>	Object of derision.
<i>Neftagna</i>	The term means "one with gun." It designated "the pacifiers" during the southern conquest.
<i>Oromo</i>	Believed to be the most populous ethnic group, the Oromo occupy most of southern Ethiopia.
<i>Ras</i>	Highest noble title equivalent to a duke.

<i>Rist</i>	A lineage system of land-ownership, giving usufruct rights to claimants.
<i>Rist-gult</i>	The right of tribute appropriation held as <i>rist</i> , that is as hereditary right.
<i>Shifta</i>	Outlaw, bandit.
<i>Shoa</i>	The south central region of Ethiopia and the home of modern Ethiopian emperors.
<i>Shumet</i>	Appointment.
<i>Teleq saw</i>	The Big Man.
<i>Tesfa</i>	Hope.
<i>Tewahdo</i>	Monophysite.
<i>Tibit</i>	Presumption and arrogance.
<i>Tigab</i>	Satiety, disobedience.
<i>Tigist</i>	Patience, endurance.
<i>Tigreans</i>	People living in the northern region of Tigre, the heartland of the Aksumite kingdom.
<i>Waq</i>	The Oromo name for God.
<i>Wollo</i>	Region situated north of Shoa.
<i>Yilunta</i>	Excessive concern for public opinion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my gratitude to all those persons whose support made the realization of this book possible. An important part of the work was done at a time when, on top of being illegally dismissed with other 40 instructors from the University of Addis Ababa in March 1993 by the TPLF Government for sheer political reasons, I was also refused entrance to the University, and hence the use of its libraries. I extend my thanks—without mentioning names—to some of my former colleagues who, in a difficult situation, came to the rescue of my project by checking out for me the much needed books and journals of the libraries of the University. I am also particularly thankful to Workineh Kelbessa for his diverse and sustained support. My appreciation also goes to Dessalegn Rahmato who, having read the manuscript, made interesting and helpful remarks.

PREFACE

The preparation and writing of this book have been most excruciating. On the one hand, one of the first demonstrations of the "democratic" commitment, so lavishly publicized, of the regime which seized power in Ethiopia in 1992 was the dismissal of a group of 40 instructors from Addis Ababa University in which I was included. Beyond personal distresses, the dismissal boded no good for the future of Ethiopia. On the other hand, the study of the failures and deteriorating condition of Ethiopia had brought me round to the harrowing idea of the responsibility of the revolutionary generation of the 60s and early 70s of which I was a member. All this suggests the autobiographical overtone of the work.

Let there be no misunderstanding: I do not blame the generation for having desired and acted to change Ethiopia—the change was incontestably needed—but for having landed the country in a situation which only succeeded in exacerbating its chronic problems. The question of identifying the snag pressed me to inquire into the reasons for the long survival and independence of Ethiopia, all the more so as those groups which were active in undermining the unity of Ethiopia mostly came from those regions which were the source and outpost of Ethiopian identity and history. Clearly, another skid had started whose consequences could reasonably be judged far more damaging than before. Nonetheless, however strongly I still maintain that Ethiopia would have been different and promising, had the educated elite opted for a course of action attentive to Ethiopian values and legacy, I am also convinced that neither the mere rejection of "ethnic policy" nor the nostalgic evocation of the past can show the way to salvation. Since history knows no determined course, the only promising choice is to extract the cure from the poison itself.

This book should be seen as a contribution towards the suggested antidote. By infusing a measure of indeterminacy into the Ethiopian crispation, it wants to announce the coming, once more, of the time of heroes. For the author, it may also be a form, however modest, of expiation.

THEORY

The first section of the paper discusses the theoretical background of the research. It begins by reviewing the existing literature on the topic, highlighting the gaps in knowledge that the current study aims to address. The theoretical framework is then presented, drawing on concepts from psychology and sociology to inform the research design. The second section describes the methodology used in the study, including the selection of participants, the experimental procedures, and the data collection methods. The results of the study are then presented in the third section, with a focus on the key findings and their implications. The final section discusses the limitations of the study and offers suggestions for future research. The paper concludes with a summary of the main points and a statement of the author's conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

This book is a philosophical study, by virtue of its origin as much as by its methodological and theoretical premises. It is an offspring of my previous 1994 book, *Meaning and Development*,¹ which attempted to understand development in terms of value systems and motivation and arrived at the conclusion that modernity is essentially the manner in which traditional values and beliefs endeavor to survive the challenges of science, nationalism, and internal social conflicts. Once modernity is seen as a form of survival, I contended, underdevelopment becomes the fate of countries which, for various historical and political reasons, were and still are not able to mobilize the ethos of survival. Wherever social erosion is at work resulting in the loss of identity, underdevelopment takes firm hold.

Among countries with the power to endure, Ethiopia probably takes the lead. It has a long history of independence, which even challenged colonialism. But no sooner is this record of sovereignty recognized than the current state of decrepitude of Ethiopia today rears up to contradict the thesis that modernity is a form of survival. Were modernity inherently so, one might argue, the stronger the survival power of a country, the more vigorous would have been its drive towards modernization. Instead, Ethiopia remains sunk in poverty and political instability; worse, its very existence is now in jeopardy, as though its instinct for survival had vanished. May it, then, be that a loss of the power of survival caused the failure of modernization? Should this question be satisfactorily answered in the affirmative, the case of Ethiopia, far from being a refutation, would forcefully underpin the thesis making modernity into a salvation of traditionality. The analysis of the rise and fall of the values associated with the perseverance of Ethiopia is therefore tantamount to a case study reiterating the main thesis of *Meaning and Development* through a Hegelian process "negation of the negation."

Let us try to render the philosophical content of this essay more visible. If by "philosophy" one understands, broadly speaking, the attempt to explain empirical phenomena by metaphysical or axiological principles which

are by nature intangible, then this study certainly qualifies as "philosophical." Of all the causes proposed by scholars to account for the survival of Ethiopia, none, this study maintains, are more basic than the impact of Ethiopian legends and values. As long as one fails to understand that survival was for Ethiopia a mission inscribed in its fundamental beliefs, one is still in the anteroom of comprehension. Small wonder, then, that Ethiopian durability seems miraculous: the history of Ethiopia has been essentially a religious venture from the start. To demonstrate the primacy of the spiritual factor, this book measures the political and socioeconomic organization of traditional Ethiopia against its value system, just as it construes the major phases of its history as the unfolding of a religious prescription. Cultural phenomena embodying the culture's value system, such as literary and artistic works, are adduced to give evidence of the role of the spiritual factor.

The use of an abstract principle to account for outward phenomena is further confirmed by the assumption that the ultimate understanding of a given society flows not from its institutions, be they economic, social, or political, but from its strategy of survival, its institutions being but weapons serving the design of durability. What is more decisive in human phenomena than the struggle between life and death, otherwise called the meaning of life? As stated by Spinoza, "*everything, in so far as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being.*"² Economic, social, and political organizations are never anything more than ways of enhancing and protecting the forces of life against the forces of destruction. Like organic life, human history is but the unfolding of this struggle, and change the manner in which the forces of life either triumph over or succumb to harmful forces. The study of Ethiopian socioeconomic and cultural systems as forms of survival therefore is sure to reach the hub of Ethiopian society.

So conceived, survival becomes a philosophy, a vision of the world and a way of life. Whenever survival is grasped as the mere consequence of certain processes, the explanation appears deficient. It must go further by turning survival into a goal, a deep-seated drive, or, if you will, the steering wheel of all human efforts. Nothing could better illustrate this philosophy than the case of Ethiopia. Were we to prove that the history of Ethiopia is but the pursuit of such a goal under most trying conditions, the particularity of Ethiopia would become symptomatic of a general drive. Consequently, when survival is depicted as the distinctive feature of Ethiopia, the distinction is due less to the peculiarity of Ethiopia in this matter than to the fact

that survival took on a defensive, garrisoned form in response to particularly hostile conditions.

We should point out the methodological rules prescribed by this approach. The attempt to study a society from inside, from the pulse of its life, avoids the projection of alien concepts onto the Ethiopian reality. So far, studies of Ethiopia have relied on extrapolated concepts, such as feudalism, class struggle, progress and reaction, to name but a few. This Eurocentrism has prevented an appreciation of the peculiarity of Ethiopia. Not that these concepts are wholly irrelevant, rather they need a good deal of adjustment if they are to reflect Ethiopian realities. Hence the endeavor of the present study to adjust those concepts so as to reflect the major ethos of Ethiopian society, namely the religious injunction of survival.

Should I study France, my major concern would be to grasp how modern French society evolved out of its most remarkable achievement, the French Revolution. Likewise, insight into British history and personality would require some understanding of the Industrial Revolution. As survival is the most remarkable achievement of Ethiopia, this study hopes to reap a more enlightened view from the adjustment of historiography to the Ethiopian reality; instead of reporting the way Ethiopians appear through Western eyes, it tries to depict them as they perceive themselves. The main concerns of this study, then, are the way Ethiopians organized their life in order to accomplish what they considered to be their mission as well as the nature of their actions and reactions in pursuit of the basic goal. Particularized as the analysis is, it wards off scientific generalizations as much as it welcomes sympathetic and inside views. After all, the midway between generality and singularity, or the expression of the true "not as substance but just as much as subject,"³ is what philosophy is all about. If the study is successful, it must define Ethiopia by showing how a certain configuration of the universal attributes of humankind produced this particular reality or subject known as Ethiopia.

In keeping with the philosophical thesis of the book, i.e. the leading role of beliefs and values in the understanding of the history and institutions of a country, we will also examine the effects created by the loss or distortion of beliefs and values. Accordingly, the impact of modernization on Ethiopia is analyzed from the viewpoint of assessing whether the adoption of Western institutions and values is the prime cause of the decline of inherited values and beliefs. And the answer is yes, all the more confi-

dently that an ill-advised process of modernization can indeed lead to loss of the sense of mission. Uprootedness, then, explains why the Ethiopian organism ceased to grow and finally became dry and brittle. It is an enigma: how comes it that a country with such a vigorous power of survival missed modernization when the latter was but a call for revival?

All the same, to avoid concluding on a pessimistic note, I would argue that the decline itself has aroused the "will-to-renaissance" as well as some favorable objective conditions. I propose, in line with the particularized thinking of this work, a theory of modernization. The theory can be considered as a solution, though not in the scientific sense of being able to produce a desired effect through a technical manipulation. In general, theories of development, be they inspired by economic or sociological analyses, have forwarded methods of institutional and economic changes which, to say the least, did not prove very successful.

Such is not the intention of this study. Following its philosophical premises, **it relies on the revival of the spiritual factor, encouraged as it is by signs of the desire for revival itching the cultural setup.** It proposes spiritual means to regenerate the mythical power on the grounds that only through the resurgence of the power of belief can Ethiopia gain confidence and come out of the misery and decline caused by years of self-depreciation and ill-gotten Westernization. The argument is ethical, since it aims at reviving the sense of duty-accomplishment against the background of a retrieved belief.

The philosophical content and objective of the essay thus established, we now proceed with the question of what exactly the notion of survival means. Survival is not restricted to the preservation of Ethiopian independence, understood as a long history going back to Aksum with no record of foreign domination. This being one aspect of the question, **survival has a wider meaning: it includes the protracted maintenance of Ethiopia's political, socioeconomic, and cultural systems.** Not only did Ethiopia always manage to remain independent, but it has also preserved almost intact its social and cultural traditions despite a history fraught with turmoil. For instance, the most important question is not how traditional Ethiopia contained militarily Islam, **but why the Ethiopians were so little attracted by Islam.**

As a matter of fact, Ethiopia can be called the land of mummification. All phenomena, be they internally generated or borrowed from outside, were preserved as though they found in Ethiopia a kind of asylum. Thus,

Proposing the
spiritual means
to regenerate...

Ethiopia: the
land of
mummification

pagan and Judaic elements still pervade Ethiopian Christianity, itself displaying a pristine form of piety. Politically, until the eruption of the revolution of 1974, the same house, called the Solomonic dynasty, is said to have ruled the country since the Aksumite kingdom. In terms of socioeconomic organization, the imposition of tax rights on a communal system of land-holding has always determined the class structure of the society. So immune to change was the Ethiopian society that an observer spoke of "the Jewish characteristic of aversion to the smallest change, whether in modes of thought or habits."⁴ One typical expression of this obsession with preservation was the isolationist tendency of the Ethiopians, their withdrawal behind the mountains every time disruptive elements reached them. Even the physical characters of the country, high mountains interrupted by deep ravines, seemed to shore up the ethos of preservation.

Nonetheless, the universalist vocation of Ethiopia was also important. Aksum had extensive political and trade relations with countries bordering the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. The country has used the ox-drawn plough for centuries, has a national script, and was converted to Christianity as early as the 4th century AD. Another universalist trait of Ethiopia is ethnic diversity. Semitic peoples have mixed with Cushitic peoples, turning the country into a melting pot. The fact of its being the only country in Africa to have established its borders by its own expansion subsequent to a military victory over colonialism is another distinctive feature of Ethiopia.

External borrowings have so great a share in the formation of Ethiopian identity that isolationism, however cherished, never became systematic. Syncretism as much as preservation defines Ethiopia. We mentioned the mixture of Semitic and Cushitic strains and the syncretization of Christianity and local traits. Many scholars have remarked how artistic and literary borrowings are done in such a way that they always bear a distinctly Ethiopian mark.

The association of isolationism with openness complicates the problem of survival. Whence did Ethiopia derive this syncretic power which, to all appearances, enabled it to preserve its identity while allowing extensive borrowings? The question turns into an enigma when we consider the conditions under which survival has been pursued. Internal as well as external conditions were far from propitious. Take, for instance, the imperial system. The same dynasty, we said, with only a short period of interruption, ruled the country from time immemorial. Yet scholars are also

else could explain such a decline, then, but **the severe damage inflicted by modernization on the foundations of Ethiopian resistance?** Having lost the sources of its vitality, is it surprising if the nation proved unable to cope with modernity? Moreover, grant that **modernization is itself a kind of resurrection following internal and external ordeals**, and Ethiopia becomes a pertinent illustration of the deep cause of **underdevelopment: uprootedness. Underdevelopment occurs every time modernization turns out to be the destroyer of tradition rather than its savior.**

Is it not symptomatic of uprootedness when a country, which had preserved its traditions untouched for centuries, sees in two generations the establishment of a monarchical autocracy, the overthrow of the imperial system, the institution of socialism, and lastly (but surely not for long), the imposition of a tangled "federal" and "liberal system"? **Each of these transformations has caused deep changes whose disruptive effects far outweighed any constructive and stabilizing outcome.** In order to validate this statement, the study goes on **to evaluate the modernizing assets of traditional Ethiopia**, such as **social mobility, the rule of power game, the existence of supra-ethnic ideology, the ascendancy of the warrior class, the tendency towards syncretism.** These characters of traditional Ethiopia so support a comparison with Japan that the divergent courses taken by the two countries illuminate the "mistakes," the uprooting impact of the Ethiopian experience of modernization.

Uprootedness appears everywhere, in the political and socioeconomic sphere as well as in the cultural realm. In addition to **destroying the modernizing potential of traditional Ethiopia**, the stray course has fortified some of its **evil tendencies.** Among such detrimental mutations are the establishment of imperial autocracy, the spread of clientelism, the ossification of class distinctions and the intensification of class oppression. These changes precipitated the country into **a severe form of alienation, equating modernization with Westernization.** The net result of all this was the creation of an unprecedented revolutionary mood, soon followed by the nation's dive into the adventure of socialism, which did nothing but aggravate all the evils of Haile Selassie's regime. Unsurprisingly, **the same cause, that is social ossification leading to leadership crisis, provoked the collapse of the imperial autocracy and the socialist regime.** **Be it noted that mobility and renewal of elites were the forces sustaining Ethiopian survival.**

The crises now shaking the nation are not so much inherited problems as products of a misfired modernization: such is the conclusion, especially

the explanation of the rise of ethno-nationalism, whose root-cause is centralization and exclusion. Generally speaking, problems of national integration, whether they are ethnic or religious, are products of the narrow foundation of the Ethiopian state. Likewise, rather than the inherited socioeconomic and cultural systems, cultural alienation and uprooted economic policies account for the persistence of underdevelopment.

Problems of the narrow foundation of the Ethiopian state.

If so, this book argues, salvation requires a return to the source, all the more so now that visible signs of a will to renaissance as well as favorable objective conditions are surfacing. Indeed, the recent ordeals and failures of Ethiopia have created a profound longing for traditional roots, whether in the form of nationalism or ethno-nationalism. Better still, the social and economic upheavals of the revolution have unintentionally injected indeterminacy into the social order and restored some past practices quite propitious for a new process of modernization. The key to the theory of modernization submitted by this study is the reversal of conception: rather than conceiving of modernization as a process at odds with tradition, it advocates the renovation of tradition under the supervision of impersonal rules, the conviction being that only the revival of the forces of Ethiopian survival can promote the drive towards modernization.

Modernization is not at odds with tradition

The argument of this study of the survival and modernization of Ethiopia is developed as follows. Chapter I defines the notion of survival through the criticism of false interpretations and unravels its components. Chapter II analyzes a major component, the national ideology resulting from the union of Church and state, and evaluates its role in the survival of Ethiopia. The contribution of the socioeconomic order is the topic of Chapter III, which emphasizes the notions of mobility and tested leadership. Chapter IV examines the cultural significance of the socioeconomic order with the intention of showing how the unity of the thinking with the mode of life forged the survival power. The study of the decline of Ethiopia begins with Chapter V: Ethiopian problems of modernization are derived from the failure to equate modernity with the revival of tradition. Chapter VI proceeds to the concrete study of the ill-inspired process of modernization, resulting in the loss of all the modernizing assets of the Ethiopian legacy. The last chapter propounds a theory of modernization: it argues for the revival of tradition in Ethiopia, a course whose plausibility flows from the aftermath of the revolutionary experience.

Chapter One

CLEARING THE THEORETICAL GROUND

Rare are those books on Ethiopia which do not open with a frank amazement at its varied and contrasted physical appearance. To many scholars, the spectacle of "high mountains—slashed by ravines and surrounded by deserts"¹ reveals the secret of Ethiopian survival. Some go further: in so rugged and cloistered a landscape, they say, dwell the national character itself as well as the course and prospects of its history. A discussion of Ethiopian survival would certainly be incomplete without some consideration of the implications of geography.

THE NATURAL FORTRESS

Among the multitude of expressions characterizing the impact of topography, such qualifications as "mountain fortress,"² "mountain citadels,"³ "impregnability of the highlands,"⁴ "inaccessibility and inhospitable fringes,"⁵ are quite common. Though many scholars feel the necessity of reinforcing this geographical argument with other considerations, the idea that the survival of Ethiopia owes much to the isolation and protection provided by its physical features still carries much weight. Seeing how discouraging and unfair the environment is to invaders, some have ascribed the "explanation of Abyssinian survival-power" to the "virtual impregnability of the highland-fastness. . . ."⁶ The invading army whose war apparatus could overcome the inaccessibility of the mountains would be so promptly faced with the insurmountable problems of supply and regrouping that it would become hopelessly vulnerable to even minor assaults. Should this army decide to shun the mountains, a better method of penetration would

not await it. It could rely neither on navigable rivers nor on ways of access other than inhospitable deserts.

The assaults are bound to be ferocious, as the geographical feature has cast the national spirit in the same mold of contrasted and isolationist traits seething with xenophobic sentiments. The contrasts of topography have, so it seems, crept into the national soul where they produce similar tensions. The Ethiopian music is believed to be most representative of this ecological impregnation. Michael Powne reads this musical reflection of the environment

in the violent side-steps (*écarts*) which break the ordinary monotony of their [Ethiopians] chants. Therein I find their character, made in the image of their immense plateaux which, seen from some summit, resemble infinite plains and which, when you try to cross them, surprise you at every moment with giddy descents and breath-taxing climbs. The moral reflection of this is seen in the character of the people, created with the most disconcerting contrasts, and even in the habits of the wild animals of this region.⁷

True enough, Ethiopian music generally exhibits a simplicity of rhythm and melody which escapes monotony only by sudden, abrupt deflections echoed by the strident sound of the *masinko* (the Ethiopian violin) and by jarringly singing voices. Tenderness, sadness, satisfaction break into tense elevations, inducing contrasting emotional states quite reflective of the physical setting.

Many observers agree on the disconcerting nature of Ethiopian character, blithely pairing individualism and authoritarianism, loyalty and self-serving propensity, loftiness and platitude, daring and circumspection. The ups and downs of Ethiopian history corroborate the perpetual conflict between grandeur and decadence. The cultural composition itself is another area of contrast. Ethiopia is the country where all sorts of external borrowings have found sanctuary once they have been cut off from their original source and brushed with Ethiopian colors. Such is the case with Judaism and Christianity. Both have been so preserved that they exist in forms no longer current in their country of origin, but also so naturalized that they are the root of haughty identity. Openness conflicts with insularity, the latter quality taking pride in having provided an asylum for the best that the rest of the world had both produced and distorted. These mountains incubate an extreme form of conservatism: the feeling of being a

sanctuary, although lacking in originality, is yet accepted as an entrustment to be defended with the utmost tenacity. Once these mountains are seen as fortresses erected by God to help the guardians of the true faith accomplish their mission, no other source need be sought for the feeling among Ethiopians of being the elect of God.

The Ethiopians themselves willingly maintain this feeling with the help of fanciful stories. Thus, as far as the Ethiopians are concerned, the ancient borders of Ethiopia reached Egypt in the north, Kenya and Uganda in the south, and Yemen across the Red Sea. The narrowing of its borders to the areas of the mountains dates from the rise of Islam. In combination with the pagan pressure from the south, the Islamic threat of total encirclement left Ethiopia with no other choice than withdrawal into the mountains. To quote one Ethiopian author:

As Ethiopia was surrounded by paganism and Islam which coerced her into abjuring her religion while she was totally committed to the Christian religion, she was obliged to abandon her maritime frontiers and await by falling back on her mountains.⁸

Assuredly, the mountains perfectly fit in with the divine design of a bulwark of a besieged faith. The essence of Ethiopian Christianity will remain largely unintelligible unless we measure the extent to which it is permeated with the "spirit" of the mountains. Unable to be anything more than a sheltered faith, small wonder it is lacking in exuberance and ostentation. The churches of Lalibela, monolithic and hewn out of rock, best symbolize this encased Christianity.

However, the other side of the story should also be told. Just as an island does, these mountains have provided protection and nurtured a fierce spirit of independence. Unfortunately, they have also induced disunity and a propensity towards a backward mode of life. Many scholars explain the two entrenched and interrelated problems of Ethiopia—namely, the weakness of political unity and the persistence of ethnic loyalties—by the geographical configuration. "Isolated and mountainous plateau massifs," remarks Richard Greenfield, "have proved, to date, almost insurmountable obstacles to the kings who sought to unify their country."⁹ Edward Ullendorff is more specific:

The special geographical features of the country, the steep escarpment which causes the most abrupt and sharply drawn linguistic

boundaries, the flux and reflux of population waves breaking against the mighty mountain massif, have all combined to maintain within small areas the most diversified conditions and to allow tiny ethnic nuclei to keep their own linguistic characteristics.¹⁰

So great was the need to overcome natural obstacles that kings had to settle for the method of wandering kingship¹¹ with its revolving capital to establish their control. Occasionally, the ramble was accompanied with skirmishes against recalcitrant regional lords, particularly as the persistence of ethnic identities gave them reason for constant quarrels. This opposition between centripetal and centrifugal forces is yet another point of contrast, turning the protecting mountains into a divisive setting.

An insular spirit is resistant to all forms of change. Ethiopia was no exception: it was not destined to be the birthplace of a spirit of innovation and change, still less of revolutionary social upheavals. Add to this "the absence of efficient means of communication"¹² as well as the "technological stagnation" resulting from "isolation from world historical forces"¹³ (both factors caused by the mountains), and you will have a fair idea of how implacably Ethiopia was doomed to a backward life.

May it be, then, that the survival of Ethiopia depended as much upon its inaccessibility as it did upon its unattractiveness? Who would firmly venture to climb the mountains if the economic prospects of conquest are not rewarding? A country whose geographical character thwarts the development of its economic resources is unlikely to become a prey to invaders, especially when the invaders have the voracious appetite of colonialism. More than to any other causes, the survival of Ethiopia during the scramble for Africa seems to be due to its physical non-viability, which greatly lessened the determination of colonial powers to subdue it.

Despite a resounding appeal, this line of thinking does not take us very far. It stumbles over a major philosophical objection, the very one pertaining to the insufficiency of geographical determinism to account for the composition of national characters. Montesquieu's axiom that different needs in the various climates shaped the different ways of living,¹⁴ when applied to Ethiopia, in addition to the commonplace objection that a society's essence cannot be explained exclusively by geography, is particularly powerless to account for the survival of Ethiopia.

Let us begin with the divisive effect of the geographical setting. Obviously, geography here plays incompatible roles. For the more we insist on

geography's divisive impact, the less intelligible becomes the very survival of Ethiopia: if centrifugal forces are induced by so unbending a condition as geographical determinism, then the long durability of Ethiopia as a united country would amount to nothing less than a constant miracle. What would hold together for so long an entity to which nature itself objected with inflexible weapons? In making the topography of Ethiopia now the cause of its ethnic and political dispersions, now the frame of its unity, the theory itself begs a serious revision and incorporation into a wider frame of explanation.

The point is not so much to deny the impact of geography as to correctly appreciate its dual role. One fact to keep in mind is that there was no dearth of invaders, and the mountains as well as the deserts have done little to discourage them. Had it been otherwise, the maintenance of Ethiopia would not have been a moot issue. As stated by Rubenson, "infiltration from the coast was not only possible but fairly easy at many points from Massawa to Zeyla; in fact it has been a constant theme throughout the long history of Ethiopia."¹⁵

So recurrent was the penetration that "the highlands have developed as a melting-pot for cultures."¹⁶ Can the supposition of historians of a strong Semitic presence in Ethiopia be defended without admitting the reality of a steady flow of migrants from southern Arabia? If so, the deeper penetrations of the migrants into southern Ethiopia and their growing assimilation with the Cushitic peoples (notably the Agew) become an established fact. What, then, should we say of the successive Muslim invasions from the east which nearly engulfed the Christian empire during the time of Gragh (the left-handed)? The way the Portuguese came to the rescue of Ethiopia little corroborates the picture of impenetrable Ethiopia. Neither do the periodic devastations of the country by revolts over problems of succession or internal discontents and ethnic conflicts. A famous case was the rebellion led by the pagan queen known as Gudit, who is said "to have attacked the Aksumite kingdom, and driven the king out."¹⁷ Especially against internal rebellions kings could not count on the steep escarpments of their empire to protect their thrones. Lastly, the Oromo expansion, which pushed on to northern Ethiopia, is enough to discredit the myth of an isolated and closed Ethiopia.

Moreover, the Ethiopians did nothing to turn the deep gorges and the massive mountains into military advantages. "The element of chivalry in their military traditions" prevented them from engaging in "guerrilla war-

fare."¹⁸ When the British led by Napier invaded Ethiopia, the insurmountable mountains did not obstruct their advance; nor were they harassed by guerrilla attacks. Likewise, just as we have difficulty in comprehending the important role played by geography in the Italian defeat at Adwa, so are we baffled as to why the mountains did little to check the Italian victory at Maichew.

Anyhow, the argument of impregnable mountains loses much of its force when a modern army is involved. Natural difficulties and problems of supply, however great they may be, can be overcome by the technological means that a modern army has at its disposal. Nor do geographical obstacles solve the question of how Ethiopia survived the scramble. Since guerrilla warfare, the only factor that could have challenged the confidence of European colonizers in their technological superiority, was never used by the Ethiopian state, Ethiopia's escape from the scramble surely requires some other explanation than the protection of the mountains.

This statement need not cancel altogether the contribution of the mountains. True, the obstacle posed by the mountains decreased in proportion to the technological capacity of the invading armies, but an obstacle they remained. We will not understand the attachment of the Ethiopians to these mountains unless we appreciate, as the Ethiopians themselves do, their protective value. They are part of the survival scheme in that they raise the cost of invasion in terms of material preparation, organization, and endurance. The perspective of this high cost has doubtless melted the determination of more than one would-be invader. Rubenson's view that "the geographical features of Ethiopia played almost no role at all in the preservation of her independence"¹⁹ is therefore excessive, all the more so as he himself ascribes this independence to "the miscalculations of Ethiopia's potential by her would-be protectors and invaders."²⁰ Underestimations of the formidable obstacle posed by the mountains must have somehow crept into their miscalculations. For instance, after her victory over Tewodros, Britain withdrew because she made, we shall say, the right calculation. A British official has analyzed the elements which entered into the calculation as follows:

Considering the short tenure of power of the Abyssinian kings, whatever be their title, the difficulty of . . . reaching their seats of empire . . . the little value of a victory . . . the risk of failure, and the certainty of expense, it has seemed to the British Government a preferable course to withdraw, as much as possible, from Abyssin-

ian engagements, Abyssinian alliances and British interference in Abyssinia.²¹

Such terms as "difficulty," "risk," "expense" suggest a calculation which must have included the geographical setting.

That said, the conditions under which the mountains really become impregnable remain to be discussed. Since they appeared passable to the British, one is moved to inquire whether the absence of certain conditions made the passage easy in this particular instance. Most historians agree in seeing the British as "the catalytic agent for the overthrow of the Emperor [Tewodros] by all the dissident elements of Ethiopia."²² The general rebellion, fomented chiefly by the Church, the Tigrean lords, and the regional nobility, had virtually isolated Emperor Tewodros. Lack of unity, therefore, rendered the mountains easily pregnable.

In this respect, the plan of attack designed by Mansfield Parkyns in his book, *Life in Abyssinia*, is most instructive. He boasted of being able to stand the attack of Abyssinian army of whatever size with only two companies of rifles or even to beat it with a battalion, "provided always . . . that somebody find me in stores, food and ammunition."²³ Interestingly, the problem will be solved

if the whole of the country east of the Taccazy had been placed in the hands of a popular Tigre chief, bound by his own interest and by hostages to assist us, not only with his troops, but, of greater importance, by procuring for us at fair native price supplies of such food for man and beast as the country afforded, and men and mules to clear the way and carry the baggage. . . .²⁴

Disunity extending to outright betrayal and resulting in the collaboration of regional lords is then one sure way by which the obstacles erected by the mountains can be overcome.

Walter C. Plowden, who was the British Consul in Ethiopia from 1848 to 1860, suggested a more refined plan of invasion. He ruled out the possibility of the Egyptian army subduing Ethiopia: the large and trained force, the organization, and the mobility required by the expedition disqualified the Egyptian army. By contrast, an European army will easily obtain submission insofar as, besides fulfilling the above military requirements, it will have the ideological advantage of racial superiority. While the "skill of European engineers" will open practicable roads, the "pres-

tige"²⁵ of the European army will make the Abyssinians doubt their own superiority. Meanwhile, "conciliatory diplomacy," aided by the sympathy created by "the similarity of religious creed,"²⁶ will take advantage of local conflicts and divisions. Given these conditions, Abyssinia will not only be militarily vanquished: it will readily submit.

The message is clear: the mountains become pregnable if disunity prevails, more so if the self-confidence and the insensitivity of Ethiopians to European prestige and charm crumble under the influence of racial prejudice. Subsequent events were to justify Plowden's view: none of his prerequisites being realized, Ethiopia emerged from the scramble untouched. A more balanced view of the role of geographical features is thus obtained if, following Trimingham, we admit that "the survival of Abyssinia was due to two factors, the first of them the national spirit based upon the legendary foundation and the common faith, and the second physical impregnability."²⁷

What about the objection according to which Ethiopia survived the scramble because its geographical features failed to whet colonial appetite? If geography either obstructs the exploitation of the country or deprives it of resources worthy of interest, conquest would be anything but reasonable. This may explain why the two major colonial powers, France and Great Britain, did not make serious attempts to overrun Ethiopia; and when this did happen, as was the case with Napier's troops, occupation was not even contemplated. That Italy alone, a secondary colonial power, took the trouble of invading Ethiopia suggests that it rushed on a prey scorned by the big powers.

In spite of apparent factual support, this assertion does not stand up to scrutiny. Nowhere does the history of colonialism vindicate the view making annexation conditional on prior assessment of economic prospects. As the expression indicates, it was a scramble, a rush to occupy as much land as possible, irrespective of economic potential. Even if we cannot exclude economic intent entirely, priority was given to annexation per se, probably with the hope of fruitful prospecting (e.g. mineral) in the future. Otherwise there would be no accounting for the indiscriminate occupation, ranging from fertile and rich lands to barren deserts, impenetrable forests infected with diseases, and remote places inaccessible to exploitation. Hence, theories, such as Marxism, which explain the phenomenon of colonialism in terms of the economic needs of the industrial powers of Europe are manifestly one-sided. Most colonies in fact neither furnished raw materials nor

absorbed exported capital. Thus, the excessive economic interpretation of such theories needs to be tempered by Joseph Schumpeter's view²⁸ ascribing colonialism more to precapitalist norms of conquest and glory than to the current needs of market and capital exportation. Besides, most European countries industrialized without having recourse to colonial possessions.

Given this colonial drive towards total occupation, the survival of Ethiopia remains an anomaly. Not only is the argument of economic unattractiveness specious, but the geographical features of Ethiopia are no more refractory to economic exploitation than are deserts, impenetrable forests, and territorial remoteness. The anomaly turns into an enigma when one considers the impossibility of a colonial ideology of conquest and supremacy to accommodate the reality of an independent and defiant Ethiopia without questioning its own essence.

In reality, colonialism had a double reason for bringing Ethiopia under its yoke: the rage of colonial conquest can only become greater the more the coveted land looks economically promising. Concerning Ethiopia, some such expectation came into Rey's mind: rejecting the possibility that "a more delightful climate, more beautiful and varied scenery, and greater fertility of soil can be found together in any single part of Africa," he wondered "why, if the country presents all these advantages, it has not become more widely known, more highly developed, more extensively settled by Europeans?"²⁹

The question becomes wholly irksome when the strategic importance of Ethiopia is recalled. Alluding to the fact that the mountains are the water tower of great rivers, such as the Shebeli, the Awash, the Nile, which irrigate the various regions of the Horn, John Markakis called the Ethiopian plateau "the water reservoir of the entire Horn, as well as Egypt; a factor of no mean geopolitical significance."³⁰ For his part, combining economic interests with strategic factors, Rubenson emphasized "the strategic importance of the country, expressed in terms of the Nile waters and the new seaway to India and the Far East," over and above the usual colonial consideration of "exportable resources . . . potential markets, and . . . availability of good agricultural land."³¹

Repeated British and French incursions into Ethiopian territory, the often conspiratorial and interventionist turn of their diplomatic relations, and the occupation of the Red Sea coast testify, if need be, to the fact that neither France nor Great Britain ever gave up the idea of conquering

Ethiopia. When the argument of economic inviability or lack of interest is thus rightly turned down, the real reason that compelled them to alter their plan is brought into relief.

To summarize, then, the position reached thus far, the survival of Ethiopia has no doubt benefited from the nature of the country's topography. Visible also are the marks with which the latter has branded the Ethiopian character. But never has geography isolated Ethiopia, nor thwarted would-be invaders. It has served Ethiopia well whenever the country was united, less so when disunity prevailed. The characterization of the mountains as impenetrable or insurmountable contains an obvious element of exaggeration. Still more is this true when would-be invaders can mobilize the technological means of a modern army. A thorough investigation is, therefore, needed into the attributes which, in combination with the difficulties of the mountains, succeeded in stopping even modern armies. Actually, herein lies the problem, since the more ragged the environment, the stronger must be the ideological cement binding together peoples that geography has otherwise compartmentalized.

THE COLONIAL QUESTION

Geography is not the only pretext found by theoreticians to account for the survival of Ethiopia during the scramble. Be it in a veiled or open manner, the idea that colonialism spared Ethiopia because the Ethiopians "took an active part of their own in the scramble, competing effectively with the French, Italians and British along Ethiopia's borders"³² is another view that is not uncommon. The episode, referred to as the southern march, saw the forced incorporation of populations now living in the southern and eastern parts of Ethiopia into the Ethiopian empire at the very time when European powers were vying for colonial possessions. By conquering and annexing huge territories inhabited by various populations (such as the Oromo, the Sidama, the Gurage, the Harere, etc.), Emperor Menelik II successfully competed against the European colonial powers to the point of doubling the size of his empire.

Two different theses link the southern march with the theme of survival. The one says: Ethiopia discouraged and even withstood European colonial threats thanks to the important resources extorted from her own newly conquered colonies. The resources enabled Menelik to build a powerful army, both by the size and quality of its weaponry, largely made of

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Two different theses link the southern march with the theme of survival. The one says: Ethiopia discouraged and even withstood European colonial threats thanks to the important resources extorted from her own newly conquered colonies. The resources enabled Menelik to build a powerful army, both by the size and quality of its weaponry, largely made of

purchased firearms. In a word, the possession of rich colonies made Ethiopia so powerful that it became uncolonizable. Not quite, retorts the other thesis, since backwardness forbids calling Ethiopia a colonial power. The said colonialism was a dependent one in that Ethiopia acted as a junior partner in the scramble. Its independence was nothing more than an arrangement whereby the role of deputy colonizer was assigned to Ethiopia.

Whatever the differences between these two positions, they agree on one basic point: colonialism was for Ethiopia not so much a threat as an opportunity. We shall study these positions in an order which will make them appear sequential rather than distinct.

In the eyes of the defenders of the colonial thesis, all the characteristics defining European colonialism are present in the southern conquest. Let us take as a reference point a definition presumed to be simple and incisive. It says:

colonialism occurs when . . . boundaries are penetrated by outsiders who are products and carriers of a different system intent upon forcefully changing the pattern of production and imposing a different set of rules.³³

Colonialism, it follows, is "a complicated and violent process involving massive use of manpower, technology, and strategy to overcome the inevitable resistance of victims."³⁴ The Ethiopian case was a perfect illustration of this kind of process. Distinctly existing systems of production, modes of life, and cultures were violated by an alien system and replaced by the system of the conqueror. The Abyssinian conquerors, chiefly represented by the Shewan aristocracy, imposed their system of production, culture, and mode of life on populations who until then had lived according to different norms and practices. In terms of violence, Menelik's conquest of the south approximated those of its European counterparts: it was an equally "ferocious process of conquest, annexation, incorporation and subjugation of peoples and territories. . . ." ³⁵ The timing was no coincidence either: both were animated by the same imperialist thrust.

So striking is the parallel between the two colonizing processes that one can maintain that

the same historical forces that created the 'Gold Coast', the 'Ivory Coast', the Sudan and Kenya, were the very ones that created

modern Ethiopia too. And a recognition of this fact makes modern Ethiopia no older than these African states.³⁶

In the case of Ethiopia, the devolution of the role of colonizer on an indigenous "feudal" class should not worry us unduly; instead, we should pay attention to the historical forces which made the two processes competitive and superposable. In both cases, the same kinds of forces imbued with the same need to expand and annex defenseless peoples were at work.

Equally irrelevant is the "backward" stage of Ethiopia. Domestic economic needs of the kind requiring expansion are enough for Ethiopia to foster a colonial design. Just as increasing needs for new markets, raw materials, new lands for settlement, explain European colonialism, so too land impoverishment, deforestation, and high population density "propelled the Abyssinian expansion southwards a century ago."³⁷ Even if the respective levels of economic necessity between Ethiopia and Europe do not coincide exactly, an expansion triggered by Ethiopian domestic economic needs is no less colonial than that of its European counterpart.

Remember too the similarity of the competitive atmosphere. By "rebuffing imperialism successfully in its north,"³⁸ Ethiopia had emerged as a power to be reckoned with. While its power was not comparable to that of the industrialized countries of the West, its successive military successes against the Egyptians, the Mahdists, and the Italians had nevertheless confirmed its status as a regional power. The advantages of its geographical location and the important resources in gold, ivory, slaves, coffee, etc., drawn from the new conquered territories, and which allowed the purchase of great quantity of firearms, combined to endow Ethiopia with a military might matching the forces that European countries could muster for overseas expeditions. All things considered, the southern populations were as much defenseless *vis-à-vis* Menelik's army as were African societies generally *vis-à-vis* British or French military forces. Menelik's army had the same crushing superiority over populations who could oppose with nothing better than unadapted traditional weapons and military organizations.

Even if Menelik's army had been no match for the colonizing armies of the West, the colonial nature of the southern expansion would still be unaltered. For the participation of Ethiopia in the scramble must be placed in the context of "the rivalry of the three limitrophe Powers,"³⁹ namely, Great Britain, France, and Italy. Because of this rivalry, "the progress of any one European country" was regarded "as a setback by the others."⁴⁰

Apart from enabling Menelik to play the one power off against the other, this situation had effectively paralyzed all three. Any advance by one of the powers being interpreted as an undue advantage over the others, the recognition of the independence of Ethiopia appeared as the only way to avoid war. The Tripartite Agreement of 1906 explicitly admitted this fact by defining the maintenance of "the integrity of Ethiopia" as "the common interest of France, Great Britain, and Italy. . ."⁴¹ Having thus reached a "stalemate," an "impasse,"⁴² the three colonial powers resorted to diplomatic and conciliatory approaches with the hope of scoring trade advantages. Menelik was quick to make these advantages dependent on the sale of firearms so that his own opponents amply furnished him with that which constituted their own superiority.

Menelik could not have afforded to purchase firearms and build a powerful army, had he not installed in the south a system of fierce exploitation such as only a colonial policy could permit. This meant land expropriation, heavy taxation, land grants to warlords and soldiers rewarding their service, all at the expense of the indigenous populations who, on top of losing their traditional right to land, had to work for their new lords. A perfect illustration of this is Menelik's land policy in the south known as

the *sisso* system, whereby two-thirds of the land was confiscated and declared state property, while the remaining third was left to the 'natives'. The confiscated land was allotted to the major warlords, who had supported the conquest. These in turn subdivided their allotted territory according to feudal hierarchical principles, among their officers, soldiers, and a vast body of retainers, according to rank.⁴³

Truly, then, just as the colonial system of Europe discriminated colonies from metropolises, two different economic systems materialized in Ethiopia. While in the north the traditional system of *rist* (which secured for each peasant the right to land and to production for domestic consumption) still subsisted, in the south a system of tenancy was introduced, heralding the appearance of large estates and cash crop productions and stimulating new northern settlers.

This major disruption and degradation of the traditional economic life of the southern peoples was compounded by a political dislocation through the creation of a local nobility known as *balabat*. It originated from grants of land along with tribute rights from the unconfiscated third to "local

balabats (traditional leaders) for loyal service," a process whereby these "leaders were forcibly feudalized."⁴⁴ In reality, however, the creation of this local nobility was nothing less than the institutionalization of "an effective form of indirect rule."⁴⁵ The gentry served as an intermediate layer in the new centralized and hierarchical organization of the south, bringing the working populations under the effective control of the higher strata of the Ethiopian state and ruling elite. This forcible integration of southern populations into the centralized administrative structures of the Ethiopian state was in itself an important disruption of their traditional life.

Another casualty of the southern expansion was cultural oppression. To assess the extent of the oppression, one must bear in mind the significant cultural, even racial, gap that divides the north of Ethiopia from the south. It is no secret that the north is predominantly Semitic, the south essentially Cushitic. Add to this the cultural chasm separating the Christian north from the pagan or Muslim south, and the picture of Amhara invaders as being as much outsiders to the southern populations as were Europeans to African societies will clearly emerge.

Let there be no talk, then, of a common heritage: there were no values or practices that the north and the south had in common. Following Donald Levine, most students of Ethiopia willingly describe the Amhara system as "hierarchical" and "individualistic," and the southern systems (notably the Oromo system) as "egalitarian" and "solidaristic."⁴⁶ The encounter—between a south still entrenched in traditional communal or collectivist systems and a north founded on a class system crowned with an imperial ideology of expansion—could not but dispose the northerners towards a feeling of superiority bordering on racism. As noted by one scholar, the northerners "tended to be paternalistic, despising and debasing local traditions and cultures. Exhibiting different manners and habits," they "were not without pretensions to a 'civilizing mission'."⁴⁷

This civilizing mission could define itself in no other terms than in those of Western colonialism. Thus, "the imperial government," it is held, not only "provided peace, law, and order," but also introduced "the superior agriculture of the north, taught them [the southerners] Christianity, and permitted them to enter national political life."⁴⁸ Even the usual denial of history to subjugated peoples was not lacking. As though southerners had neither their own history nor their distinct cultural personalities, teaching and research essentially emphasized the history and culture of the north.

Still less was there a tendency to recognize the contribution of the southern peoples to the integrity and wealth of Ethiopia.

For the defenders of the colonial thesis, the outcome of Ethiopian colonialism was no less debilitating and scourging than European colonialism. The imposition of Amhara culture and language, through which a mitigated form of assimilation was attempted, suppressed local cultures without encouraging full participation in the ruling culture. Some distance guarding against the fading of the ethnic demarcation was purposely kept. The acculturation relied more on a superficial imitation of Amhara culture than on a stimulating assimilation. As a result, people were either uprooted or obliged to defend their identity through cultural rigidity. In both cases, they were far from experiencing a process of cultural blossoming. Nowhere is the debilitating loss of identity more perceptible than with the Oromo. The imposition of class distinction on the egalitarian system of the Oromo brought about a state of mind coupling "submissiveness and aggression" with "authoritarian and individualistic"⁴⁹ traits.

Thus, no single one of the ingredients composing colonial policy seems to be absent from the southern march of imperial Ethiopia. Like its European counterpart, Ethiopia's colonial expansion participated in the same historical drive, responded to domestic economic needs, and used similar methods of conquest, administration, and surplus extraction, the whole vindicated by comparable ideological justifications. Then nothing seems to stop us from embracing the theory according to which Ethiopia survived the scramble for Africa thanks to the colonial subjugation of the southern peoples. As glorified by one scholar,

without the contributions of Ethiopia's southern peoples, whose sweat and blood go unrecorded in 'Ethiopianist' annals, the Battle of Adwa in 1896 might not have been won and Menelik II might not have gone on to build his empire.⁵⁰

Yet a conclusion of this nature leaves us uneasy. Objections abound, some theoretical, others factual, all pointing to the untenability of the thesis. A major theoretical objection springs from the backwardness of Ethiopia. A theory which places such a backward country as Ethiopia at the level of colonial power, still more which makes it a contender with European colonial powers, can hardly escape the label of extravagance. Contrary to the European colonial objectives, the Ethiopian expansion had neither the purpose of extracting raw materials, nor the want of new markets, far less

the need to export capital. The theory of dependent colonialism has been contrived to answer to this and other objections. Let us review the main lines of its argumentation.

The theory of dependent colonialism admits the precapitalist nature of Ethiopian economy. It thus rules out the possibility of Ethiopia becoming a colonial power all by itself. But suppose for a moment that the southern expansion of Ethiopia was a move inspired and backed by European colonialism; then the objection pertaining to the impotence of Ethiopia to be a colonial power loses much of its relevance. "European assistance,"⁵¹ so to speak, made up for the deficiency; it provided the "guns and skills"⁵² which broke down the resistance of the southern peoples. Only as an agent of European colonialism did Ethiopia acquire the means for its own colonial expansion.

One of the merits of the "dependent colonialism" thesis is to expel many of the myths enveloping Ethiopia. Notably, the survival of Ethiopia from the scramble must no longer be ascribed to the "bravery and patriotism" of the Ethiopians, as if these were such that "the imperialists could not defeat."⁵³ Ethiopia survived for the simple reason that it allied itself with European imperialism for the subjugation of African peoples. It had no prior superiority over the southern peoples, as witnessed by its repeated failures to subdue them in the past. European assistance alone rendered the southern conquest possible. Moreover, the conquest brought neither peace nor prosperity to the southern populations, but only the ravages of colonial exploitation.

A question comes to mind: Why was Ethiopia chosen to become an agent? Why not the Oromo or the Sidama, since all were at a comparable stage? Two answers are usually proposed. The one answer pertains to cultural affinity, that is, to Christianity; obviously "a religion common to the Ethiopian and European ruling classes"⁵⁴ promised a better partnership. The second reason is provided by the notion of stalemate. As already discussed, the major colonial powers had reached an impasse in Ethiopia. Short of war, the only way out was to recognize Ethiopia's sovereignty while incorporating it into the capitalist world by promoting it to the rank of assistant colonizer.

All things considered, the method of dependent colonialism was "cheaper and easier than direct colonization."⁵⁵ Not only was the task of conquering and pacifying the southern populations left to the Ethiopians, but at one stroke European imperialist powers had both avoided war be-

tween themselves and saved themselves the trouble of conquering Ethiopia. Trade relations with Ethiopia based on unequal exchange were enough for them to reap all the economic advantages without the cost of military expedition and direct control. The method was already quite polished since, besides Ethiopia, Portugal, Belgium, and South Africa⁵⁶ had also acted as dependent colonizers in Africa.

Somali political leaders, be it noted, had long before aired this view through the notion of "Euro-Abyssinian colonialism".⁵⁷ Though they admit that during the scramble for Africa "Abyssinia had every right to safeguard her integrity, and the skill with which she conducted her external affairs, surrounded as she was by European colonial powers, is to be admired",⁵⁸ the colonial possessions are now outdated and no longer justifiable. Just as all European colonial powers have surrendered their colonial dominions, so too must Ethiopia release its conquests by according the right to self-determination to all the nationalities that it has enslaved. In this way, the main objective of the colonial thesis comes out clearly: it seeks no less than the dismemberment of Ethiopia.

A deeper comprehension of the thesis is obtained if its true source is exposed. Even a cursory investigation shows that colonialism claims responsibility for the theory. In order to undermine Ethiopian resistance, Italy forged the notion of "Greater Somalia" comprising the emirates of Jimma and Harar and openly supported Islam. During the five years of occupation, it divided Ethiopia along ethnic lines, the purpose of which was to create internal divisions and provoke "the revolt of the non-Amhara populations such as the Oromo and the Muslims."⁵⁹ The idea of "Greater Tigre" was another divisive project hammered out by Italy and Great Britain to underpin their colonial design. Explicit in all these sundering projects was the idea of Ethiopian colonialism which, if accepted, would paint the European colonizers as providential liberators.

From whichever direction we examine the thesis, and whoever is its apologist, the invalidity of the Ethiopian state in its present borders is what the theory supports. The insertion of the colonial issue into the Ethiopian state presents its dissolution as the only viable solution, for no agreement or compromise, still less integration, can be achieved between the colonizer and the colonized. Thus, nothing has fundamentally changed: we began with a besieged belief, we have ended with a besieged nation, surrounded by the same hostile forces and still struggling to survive, with its strength, unfortunately, greatly reduced.

CRITIQUE OF THE COLONIAL THESIS: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Let me begin by clearly stating the direction of my criticism. In no way do I intend to underestimate, let alone deny, the suffering and exploitation of the southern populations under the yoke of imperial rule. But so was the fate of the northern peasants who could boast of no better condition than the abstract right of being ruled by their kinspersons in accordance with the norms of their own culture. My criticism will rather reprove theoretical inconsistencies and factual misinterpretations on the one hand, and the blurring of the distinction between difference in degree and difference in kind on the other. Just as the anatomy of an ape, although otherwise differing little from that of human beings, is yet marked by an unbridgeable gap, so is an irreducible disparity clearly demarcating the southern expansion of Ethiopia despite some similarities with Western colonialism. By equating the oppressive practices in Ethiopia with colonial rule, the colonial thesis gets into a tangle whose outcome is to obscure the very concept of imperialistic colonialism. Hence the need to make a distinction between expansionistic colonialism, which best describes the southern expansion of Ethiopia, from imperialistic colonialism, which was the appanage of Western industrialized countries. The former signifies an extension of the system, the latter the subordination of an inferior system to a superior one.

The theoretical inconsistencies of the theory of dependent colonialism are particularly noticeable. A basic question never stops cropping up: where lies the difference between dependent colonialism and what is generally known as neocolonialism? According to the theoreticians of dependent colonialism, the difference consists in the "withdrawal of European-born representatives and their replacement by locally born persons who were put in charge of the intact institutional structures,"⁶⁰ while in the dependent colonialism of Ethiopia no such withdrawal occurred.

The suggestion that the rulers of Ethiopia are not "African-born representatives"⁶¹ does more than deride the theory; it straightforwardly invites us to take no notice of the alleged difference between Ethiopia and the rest of Africa. After all, what happened in Ethiopia a century ago was to be the model of decolonization, since decolonization granted the status of nation to collections of different ethnic groups and tribes assembled by the colonial powers. Put differently, direct colonialism was transformed into dependent colonialism, or, in conventional terms, into neocolonialism. For

everything concurs: the present rulers of African countries are junior partners whose role is to promote and protect world imperialist interests. They are given all the means in order to fulfill this task, including firearms. For their service in maintaining the working people in a state of subordination, they are allowed a share from the plunder. As in Ethiopia, the policy proved cheaper than direct control; in fact, "de-colonization has led to what might be called the 'Ethiopianization' of Africa."⁶²

The argument according to which in the case of Ethiopia (unlike the rest of Africa) an outsider is still ruling has no relevance. Seeing the multiethnic nature of African states and the ethnic conflicts which disrupt them, the issue of the outsider is neither peculiar to Ethiopia nor purely incidental to the continent. It is inherent to the neocolonial order, which patently ensures that one ethnic group have dominance over the others and that the "national" interest be constantly sabotaged by the interests of powerful outsiders. We must not downplay the divisive force of the African ethnic ethos by making it appear as an Ethiopian singularity—Ethiopia is not the only country where ethnically different peoples treat each other as outsiders.

Grant that dependent colonialism is the classical form of neocolonialism, and the generation of dependent rulers will appear as the rule of the neocolonial order rather than an Ethiopian exception. Ruling classes in Africa with their ethnic clientelism are no less dependent colonizers than are Ethiopian ruling classes: both impose alien interests on African societies through a political system of ethnic favoritism and foreign alliance. But, one may object, there is an important nuance: the Ethiopian rulers, unlike their African counterpart, have the distressing habit of thrusting their culture and language on the populations they come to control. Agreed, but imagine the Amhara using the English language, or even being replaced by another ethnic group. Would the structure of dependent colonialism change? Even in the case of a country with a homogeneous ethnic composition, the structure would remain intact. In vain does one attempt to create a new concept out of the ethnic factor. So long as the national economy is dependent on outside capital and market, any ruling class, whatever its ethnic composition or status, is by definition a dependent colonizer, a junior partner of world imperialism. Nothing is really new in this theory of dependent colonialism, except the desire to create confusion by the lure of a new concept.

So much is this the case that for the defenders of the colonial thesis themselves the Amhara issue ends up by becoming something quite marginal. Take the case of Eritrea. Supporters of the colonial thesis strongly defended Eritrea's right to be free of "Ethiopian colonial administration."⁶³ Yet the argument of the outsider is here of little help, as denial of the cultural and historical links between Ethiopia and Eritrea is scarcely defensible. If the Tigreans and Amhara "share the same basic norms, values and beliefs,"⁶⁴ how much more so may the Tigreans and Eritreans who, on the community of culture, add the dimension of linguistic identity? The same reasoning cannot recognize the Tigreans as Ethiopian and yet speak of the Eritreans as colonized peoples. So when one refers to Eritrea as having been an Ethiopian colony, the rule of an outsider is not what is at stake. Neither is the national or ethnic oppression the issue since the Tigreans, though equally oppressed, are not exhorted to give up their Ethiopian identity. The attempt to intrude the notion of outsider into what is called Ethiopian colonialism never consistently supports the thesis.

Actually, the very reasons justifying the new terminology of dependent colonialism are too shaky. Ethiopia, so it is argued, could not have been a colonizer by itself in view of its utter backwardness. The Ethiopians had no an "expanding superior . . . civilization,"⁶⁵ any more than they had "the level of development" that would have allowed them "to defend themselves against the European technology and military organization."⁶⁶ Some scholars went further by revealing the existence of superior civilizations in the south. Such was the case with Jimma, "renowned for its superiority over the Amhara provinces in handicrafts, agriculture, and the efficiency of its government."⁶⁷ Wallega too was "a rich and progressive Galla region"⁶⁸ as well as the kingdom of Kaffa which, in the eighteenth century, "equalled or rivalled the then declining Ethiopia."⁶⁹ Thus, everything is inverted: Menelik's conquest was simply a *barbaric invasion*. A possible confirmation of this was the reluctance of the Amhara conquerors to uproot the beliefs and values of the conquered populations so as to supplant them by Christian and Amhara values. At the risk of distressing the apologists of the colonial thesis, one scholar finds that "the doctrine of Amhara rule embraced no creed of having precepts of a 'civilizing mission' to perform."⁷⁰

Even those theoreticians of the colonial thesis who would consider these assessments of southern civilizations exaggerated cannot totally disregard them. Willy-nilly, they are faced with the question of knowing to what extent it is relevant to speak of Ethiopian colonialism when no clear-cut

civilizing mission and cultural superiority marked off the conquerors. Possibly the conquerors may have felt superior; even so, should theoretical works that purport to be objective fail to tell whether or not the feeling of superiority can avail itself of any factual support. The point is not to translate feelings into theories, but to assess, beyond feelings and false ideologies, the real historical forces that came into play.

I hasten to add that the more the theory of dependent colonialism puts Ethiopia on the same level as the southern peoples, the weaker become the reasons for choosing Ethiopia as a junior partner and for accusing it of harboring colonial designs, dependent or not. If Ethiopia was as backwards as, or more backwards than the conquered territories, the choice of the colonizer making into it an agent does not appear as an enlightened one. Having no better entitlement than its alleged colonies, possessing no advanced methods over them, its deputation to colonial exploitation would certainly impair rather than bolster the interests of colonialism. At any rate, the sharing of a common backwardness excludes the projection of Western style colonial intent on the southern populations. Conquest, yes, but only in the traditional sense of expansion, which had no historical similitude other than circumstantial with the European imperialist enterprise.

The colonial doctrine evaporates as soon as we pay attention to the news that the "colonized" had almost turned out to be the "colonizer." Indeed, theoreticians of dependent colonialism readily admit that, prior to the scramble, "the Abyssinians and Oromos had tested each other and maintained consistent and clear cut boundaries between their homelands."⁷¹ Better still, "on matters of land, power, religion, and trade, the Oromo and the Abyssinians were the main contenders in the Horn of Africa."⁷² Their contention was such that in many places the Abyssinian border was pierced, letting the Oromo penetrate far into Gojjam, Begemder, and even Tigre. Hardly was this situation comparable to the superiority of Western colonizers over the defenseless peoples of Africa. How, then, could the relationship between two contending forces turn into a colonial conquest of the type involving an outsider with a matchless superiority? Of no use is the argument of the firearms provided by European colonizers. The firearms have no doubt changed "the balance of power in favor of the Ethiopians,"⁷³ but balance of power there was between the two forces. This barely corroborates the image of a colonial expedition sent against powerless peoples.

Then, the supposition that, instead of the Amhara, the Oromo could just as easily have conquered Ethiopia is not mere speculation. Since there was scarcely a time when the Oromo "could not establish permanent dominance over Abyssinia,"⁷⁴ expansion of some sort was inevitable—one had to conquer the other. The question was not whether the conquest could have been avoided, but rather who would be the conqueror. Thus, by their very expansionist history, the two peoples were destined to merge. The course of history, especially the colonial episode, favored the Amhara to become the agent of unification, but it did not create the tendency which, everyone agrees, is prior to European colonialism. In brief, colonialism precipitated a tendency already present. In view of all these facts, it is strange indeed that the theory of dependent colonialism reads an indigenous historical trend as a colonial design.

Let no one be misled into believing that the unification would have taken a radically different form had it been initiated by the Oromo. The qualifications used by the theoreticians of dependent colonialism to describe the Oromo expansion are clear enough: the Oromo invaded territories populated by non-Oromo peoples; they were as much "outsiders" to these peoples as were the Amhara to the Oromo, and acted in a comparable manner. Let us listen to a characteristic report:

the Oromo easily entered huge areas in a short time. At this early stage in their migration, the pastoral Oromo seem to have manifested unique characters of adaptability. They easily adapted to another environment and coalesced with indigenous people, and at the same time they imparted their language and the complex Gada system . . . An unusual aspect of Oromization was that many of the absorbed groups were nomads. The Oromo genius for assimilation quickly claimed any non-Oromo, defeated or otherwise.⁷⁵

The description also adds that "the Oromo had made the conquered people *gabare*," as a result of which the vanquished "became serfs or clients of the pastoral Oromo, who now demanded service and tribute from them."⁷⁶

Besides subjecting the conquered peoples to a rule reminiscent of the Amhara dominion, the Oromo expansion promoted a policy of "Oromization" which resembled the Amharization so forcefully denounced by the Oromo "nationalists". I fail to understand why in the case of the Amhara it is called colonization and in the case of the Oromo coalescence

or assimilation. Should it be due to the assistance provided by the Western colonizers? But one has not yet proven that Menelik conquered the southern land on behalf of the West rather than himself. The use of firearms bought from the West does not make the conquest a Western conquest, any more than the muskets provided by the Turks would have made Cragn's rule over Ethiopia a Turkish conquest. Facts present indigenous forces vying for supremacy in the Horn of Africa; the external assistance was simply grafted onto a process already in action.

The expansionist tendency of the Amhara was even more pronounced. Backed by an ideology of grandeur inscribed in the *Kibre Negest*, it was a legacy of Aksum whose history attests a continuous expansion from the north to the south. In the historical epoch which concerns us here, the ideology was revived in the Shewan dynasty's project to reconquer all the provinces lost to Islamic expansion. This revival infused new vigor into a political system already intrinsically prone to expansion. Indeed, expansion "was a built-in necessity," since the ability of Ethiopian emperors "to grant new land was critical for the retention of the support of the nobility."⁷⁷

An understanding of the indigenous nature of the expansion is essential, therefore, to dismiss the colonial thesis. True, the Amhara expansion was halted by the Oromo resistance. True also that their inner expansionist tendency brought them to a stalemate. Firearms changed the whole situation, because they were a response to a need emanating from the imperial ideology. If the Oromo, while being among the contenders in the Horn, did not acknowledge the usefulness of firearms to further their need for expansion, the explanation lies in their lack of political unity as well as in their relative heedlessness, as compared with the Ethiopian ruling class, of the threat of colonialism. Firearms were introduced in Ethiopia because a traditional ideology was in need of them and ready to use them. It is simply a historical fallacy and grave inconsistency to suggest that the southern expansion was a delegation of Western colonialism to the Shewan ruling class.

A digression is here in order. The colonial theory, including the version of dependent colonialism, does no more than distort a major process of historical attraction which, as in other moments of world history, served to bring together peoples whose unity would destine them for great deeds. The important point is not under whose rule the rapprochement of peoples is realized, but the cultural crossbreeding which fertilizes them, changes

them, and so invests them with new ambitions. Need we recall that the major reason for the achieving mentality of Europe is the formidable mixture of cultures which, more than anywhere else in the world, regularly irrigated the continent? Whether we take the Greek civilization, the Roman Empire, the German invasions, or the Judeo-Christian spirituality, Europe stood as the privileged heir to all these movements of ideas and populations. Likewise, what other continents have achieved was proportional to their degree of openness to external inseminations. Due to lineage stiffness, Black Africa was the continent where this kind of cross-fertilization was the least carried through. The few empires which appeared here and there were too ephemeral to produce any lasting effects and the lineage-laden mentality prevailed. It still prevails under the guise of ethnic nationalism, with the evident result of blocking the process of modernization.

The massive expansion of the Ethiopian state in the era of colonialism created in the Horn of Africa the opportunity for an important mixture of peoples and cultures. For obvious reasons, the Ethiopian state alone could have been the instrument of such a concoction. Where previous emperors—and, in a sense, Gagn—had tried and failed to realize, Menelik succeeded in finally bringing the majority of the peoples of the Horn under one state. His partial failure was due to the presence in the Red Sea of the most aggressive colonial powers, with which he had to come to terms. Our chapter on modernization will discuss how the great historical design sketched by Menelik's conquest turned into a sterile ethnic domination. But in no way does this alter the fact that Menelik was an empire builder of historic proportions. By trying to arouse an irreconcilable animosity between peoples, the theory of colonialism is yet another way of undermining, consciously or not, the historical calling.

Given the ethnic origin of the scholars who adhere to the theory of dependent colonialism, the theory seems to be the expression of bitterness at having missed the opportunity of being the unifier. Conquest, I repeat, was inevitable. For some Oromo intellectuals, quite naturally the task should have devolved upon the Oromo. Hence their disappointment and grudge which, however, should not be allowed to have precedence over the facts of history. Broadly speaking, the outcome would not have been different from *what it now is, had the Oromo been the agent of the junction*. The only adverse historical force able to prevent the trend was European colonialism. The colonial occupation of Ethiopia would have meant the appear-

ance of small nations whose borders would have been determined according to the advances reached by each of the contending colonial powers. Or else the one colonial power would have had the whole lot, in which case the situation would have been comparable to present day Ethiopia. The likelihood, however, would have been the partition of Ethiopia which, as observed elsewhere in Africa, need not follow ethnic configurations. A prime example of this is the creation of Eritrea: via its separation from its ethnic base in Tigre, it was driven out of its cultural and historical space, Ethiopia. The gathering of the Oromo under the Ethiopian aegis is, then, what saved them from utter dispersion. The great success of Menelik was to prevent all these probable developments from happening. In so doing, he left the task of Amharization—and Oromization, et cetera—to future generations. The name matters little, as none of these would have realized something different from what we now call Ethiopianization.

To come to our point after this long parenthesis, the characterization of dependent colonialism as a cheaper system of exploitation is striking in its implausibility. It would become cheaper, were the southern populations able to raise the cost of direct occupation by opposing fierce and challenging resistance. In the absence of viable state structures and given the systematic use of firearms, the possibility of strong resistance must be excluded. For an European expedition, the conquest of southern Ethiopia would not have been more difficult or hazardous than had been other conquests in Africa. Why, then, would European colonialism be in need of a partner as cumbersome and unfit as the Ethiopian state when it could have easily conquered and administered the rich lands by itself, and so exploited them more efficiently?

It is argued that a stalemate between the three colonial powers made direct occupation impossible. Here also we do not understand why the colonial powers, which so far had amicably agreed to divide between themselves all the lands stretching along the Red Sea, would fail to strike a bargain concerning the southern part of Ethiopia—unless the said stalemate was caused by the intervention of a local rival, powerful enough to strip colonial expeditions of their character of being no more than excursions. The theory of dependent colonialism ignores the complicating nature of the Ethiopian state in the colonial calculations pertaining to the Horn of Africa. What created the impasse is less the rivalries between the three colonial powers than the intrusion of an indigenous African player.

This quadruple game halted the advance of colonialism. Italy refused to abide by the stalemate; it was called to order by its defeat at Adwa.

Had Ethiopia really been a dependent colonizer at the time of the partition, the very purpose of the Italian invasion would cease to be intelligible. Why would Italy decide to conquer, colonize its own partner? And why would Ethiopia enter into armed conflict with a country whose assistance enabled it to have superiority over its conquered peoples? Discourses on partnership, alliance, however adroitly they may be contrived, cannot cover up the irreconcilable conflicts opposing Ethiopia to the colonial powers. The "bottom line" is that the colonial thesis cannot account for the events which marked the history of Ethiopia during and after the scramble without indulging in extravagant interpretations.

Take, for instance, the bizarre turn imparted to the alleged northern colonization of the south. Not being an industrial power, Ethiopia could develop none of those needs related to raw materials, new markets, and export of capital. As a result, the whole process went in the opposite direction to that of the European colonial order. As René Lefort pointed out,

by definition, colonialism presupposes that the metropolitan power maintains in the colonized territories a pre-capitalist mode of production, or at least one that is historically prior to its own. The opposite happened in Ethiopia. The forms and relations of agricultural production were distinctly more advanced in the south than in the north, with the development of private ownership of land, higher rates of tenancy, the appearance of agricultural wage-labourers in the big mechanized holdings and/or of an army of peasants made landless by expulsions and the spread of cash crops that fed the towns and provided most of the exports . . . Industry was concentrated along the Addis Ababa-Dire Dawa axis.⁷⁸

A true characterization of the situation would go beyond pointing out the lesser development of the north, would indeed tell of its utter marginalization. What could better show the divergence of Ethiopian expansion from the model of European colonialism than this inversion of the "normal" colonialist order of things? The essential pattern of colonial occupation—i.e. the distinction between metropolises and satellites—was not reproduced by the southern expansion. Far from going through a process of satellitization, the conquered territory became the center of economic and political activities, to the detriment of the north.

One expects the objection according to which the merit of the theory of dependent colonialism is to render such arguments irrelevant by giving each actor his due. Ethiopia was only the agent, the real colonizer was the West; thus the metropolis-satellite relationship was maintained, but through the agency of Ethiopia. The economic target being the south, the north was simply the coercive instrument to harness the south to the real metropolises of the West. Not surprisingly, while the north was impoverished, the south was relatively developed.

But then, should we talk of Ethiopia as being itself anything other than a colony? The theory of dependent colonialism here reaches the apex of inconsistency. For whichever way round we twist the concept, there is no way in which Ethiopia could become a junior partner of Western colonialism unless it be itself already a colony. As the expression itself indicates, for Ethiopia to be an agent, to act for European colonialism, it must be given the authorization and the means to do so, but it must also be deprived of any purpose of its own save the right to a modest share from the exploitation as payment for its services. In what other term than in that of a colony can we characterize a country so controlled and with no purpose of its own? Loss of sovereignty alone can launch out Ethiopia on the conquest of a territory for a third party. The situation recalls the case of Egypt colonizing Sudan while itself being a British protectorate. Only in such a case does the expression "dependent colonialism" make sense: through the agency of Egypt, which was provided with the necessary means and permission, British colonialism did extend its control over Sudan. For the concept to be applicable to Ethiopia, the British-Egypt type of relationship should have governed the relation of Ethiopia with the colonial powers of Europe. If the distinction between real colonizers and their agents is established, then the conclusion is obvious: the agent has beforehand been a colony or a protectorate.

In spite of heavy facts to the contrary, let us assume that such has been the case of Ethiopia. Then the characterization of the Abyssinians as colonizers sinks into complete aberration. Manifestly, colonized peoples cannot be accused of being themselves colonizers, any more than the Indian troops used by the British to expand their colonial possessions or the traditional chiefs of indirect rule can be accused of being colonizers. An important implication follows: by virtue of having been the means for foreign colonial expansion, present day Ethiopia is the product of colonial history. Like any African state, its present borders and ethnic composition

constitute a colonial legacy legally underpinning its claim for national integrity. In this respect, what is true of African states is also true of Ethiopia; it too is "an ex-colony like all the others with colonial boundaries that defined its sovereign statehood."⁷⁹

Thus, once the theory of dependent colonialism has related Ethiopia's present borders to Western colonial expansion, the argument in favor of the right to self-determination of the nationalities now under the Ethiopian state becomes inconsequential. In this regard, Ethiopia is much more the rule than the exception. The country where the principle of the legal intangibility of colonial legacy, irrespective of ethnic configurations, has found its first application is Ethiopia. As Lewis notes,

colonization and decolonization had the unintended effects of establishing the multi-national, pluralist state as the dominant strain on the continent. Thus the majority of Africa's new states . . . are fortuitously cast in the mould of Ethiopia. Like that traditional African conquest state, they consist of a loose assemblage of different ethnic groups and 'tribes'.⁸⁰

Let there be no misunderstanding. Intangibility refers to internationally recognized legality; it does not invalidate the moral right to self-determination. However, the pertinence of the issue proceeds from the propensity of the theory of dependent colonialism to base its claim not on the moral but on the legal right by arguing that while "European colonial powers have surrendered their colonial possessions, Ethiopia . . . still clings to the illgotten gains of her imperial past."⁸¹ In short, the outsider—the colonizer—is not gone, on the pretext that its expansion has no similarity with colonial conquest. Since, in the words of the theory itself, the Ethiopians were not the real colonizers, they have no reason to go, nor to surrender the legacy of colonial conquests of which they have been an instrument in a way not different from a colonial army or traditional chiefs.

The colonial question becomes a muddle as soon as it is founded on ethnic argument instead of colonial legacy. Questions of self-determination no longer addressed to the real colonizer do not fall within the purview of colonialism. Self-determination may mean justice, equality between ethnic groups, but in no way is it a colonial issue in abeyance. According to the theory of dependent colonialism, Ethiopian colonialism has never existed; it was rather the European colonization of Ethiopia through the instrumentality of the Shewan aristocracy. The resulting multi-ethnic state

perfectly conforms to the established order that evolved from world post-colonial history. The norm of this order strictly refrained from defining a nation by its ethnic homogeneity. So universally was this accepted that the closely related Arab populations were content with the states inherited from colonialism. Even the Somali who defied the colonial borders in the name of cultural and ethnic unity seem to revert to the colonial order, thus themselves rejecting the idea of "Greater Somalia."

We can now examine what I call the practice of amalgam. It springs from the now open, now hidden attempt to taint the southern march with a racist connotation. No one would even imagine, let alone support, the idea of Ethiopian colonialism, were not the racist argument conjured up in one form or another. However feeble the argument may be, it is essential to endow the whole process with a colonial flavor. Here some prior theoretical remarks are necessary.

Analyses of European colonialism usually give priority to the economic needs of imperialism. Whether they are of Marxist inspiration or not, the economic benefits accrued from colonies are supposed to be the driving force. Far be it from me to contest the importance of the economic factor! Nonetheless, the importance of the economic falls short of reflecting the spirit and method of European colonialism if the racist component is not accorded its proper place. Prior to European colonialism, world history has registered various forms of conquest and colonial annexation. They all caused contradictions, but none greater than European colonization, which was so degrading and discriminating that it provoked an explosion of nationalist movements. The racist ideology of imperialism, no less than the specific needs of capitalism, defines the particularity of European colonialism.

The concomitance between European imperialist expansion and the formulation of evolutionary theories has puzzled many theoreticians. Though the eighteenth century had focussed on the idea of progress, it had preserved the image of the noble savage, living in harmony with nature and realizing the human essence. With the rise of evolutionism, the good savage was suddenly changed into a retarded human race, into a contemporary ancestor⁸² in need of civilizing mission. The purpose of this mission was to unlock primitive societies so as to raise them up towards the level of the industrialized society. For accomplishing these ends, all means were justified, including violence. No restriction whatsoever should be allowed to impede the fulfillment of such a sacred task. Colonization became

a process of forcible acculturation whereby peoples stuck in a state of immobility were put back into the drive of history.

In this way, the concept of tutorial government was postulating nothing less than an identity of interests between the colonizers and the colonized peoples,⁸³ even though it justified at the same time the role of pigmentation in the generation of evolutionary disparities. In view of the connection between social evolutionism and the biological model of species differentiation, the temptation was indeed great to establish a parallel between the social and the biological which would relate the advanced stage of European civilization with the color of the skin. The association of the color of the skin with superior human potential produced an in-built racism peculiar to European colonialism. It became a scientific undertaking whereby, using such sciences as anthropology and ethnology, European civilizing mission was set on the task of amending some of the glaring defects of the evolutionary process.

This technical, manipulating objectification of the colonized peoples by definition excluded any serious attempt at assimilation and integration. The correction of shortcomings could never eradicate the disparity marking the races. Previous forms of colonization, although otherwise imbued with the sense of superiority on the part of colonizers, were yet essentially expressed in terms of cultural supremacy. Only European colonialism came up with a biological distinction ranking human races. The color bar once set, all forms of assimilation became unadvisable and contrary to the evolutionary trend. While most previous forms of colonization had ended up in integration, in the rise of new nations merging the conquerors and the conquered into a cultural and political entity, the color obstacle of European colonialism stirred up discontent and confrontation whose inevitable outcome was the proliferation of nationalist struggles for self-determination.

Studies of the rise of African nationalism show to what extent, despite cultural uprooting and social malaise, even among Black intellectuals, "the tendency to recommend assimilation prevailed over the rare critical questioning"⁸⁴ until the second World War. The colonial empire was not questioned in its legitimacy; what is more, assimilation into the conquering culture was ardently desired. Criticisms were essentially directed at the segregationist practices hindering assimilation. Only when assimilation proved to be impossible did nationalist awareness start to be kindled, with Black intellectuals affirming more and more their identity and thinking in

terms of self-determination. Racism, then, disguised as a civilizing mission, is both a characteristic of European colonialism and the source of Black nationalism.

Let us now see whether practices in any way comparable to European colonialism demarcated the southern expansion during and after the conquest. This way of positing the problem is justified in the light of the willingness of the defenders of the colonial thesis to put forward the racial and cultural distinction between the north and the south. They speak of the opposition between "the Semitic-speaking highland kingdom of Abyssinia" and the south, "a different ecological zone" inhabited by "the Cushitic nations of the region."⁸⁵ In truth, theoreticians of Ethiopian colonialism are not alone in making this distinction. The recounting of Ethiopian history in terms of the Semitic versus the Cushitic pervades the writings of even those scholars who are quite inimical to the colonial thesis. The theme of the Semitic peoples migrating from Arabia and further expanding to the south by subjugating the Cushitic peoples dates back to the Aksumite period. Add to this racial difference the cultural gap due to Christianity and the social disparity created by the imperial system, and you have all the ingredients to concoct a racist theory in Ethiopia.

However, no sooner have theoreticians stressed the distinction than, forced by facts, they void it by insisting on integration and fusion. To quote a case:

These Arab tribes, gradually conquering the indigenous Hamitic population, intermarrying with them and imposing upon them their language and culture, formed the nucleus of the Abyssinian people, which is thus predominantly Semitic in culture, but predominantly Hamitic in blood.⁸⁶

Such a protracted process of racial and cultural fusion hardly justifies the use of the term imposition, still less the discrimination of a Semitic stock from the native populations. The reality about Ethiopia is not the Semitic versus the Cushitic, but all-out syncretism.

All aspects of Ethiopian life bear testimony to this syncretism. Thus, because Ethiopian Christianity is "deeply steeped in Agao mythology both pagan and judaic,"⁸⁷ it appeared to some observers "as an aberrant form of Christianity,"⁸⁸ to others as an indigenous form of Christianity. Likewise, the imperial system itself has probably derived its religious aureole

from the African notion of divine kingship, which existed in its classical form in the southern kingdoms. As noted by Perham,

there are signs that the Ethiopian monarchy, like the monarchies of Kaffa, Janjiro and other neighbouring states, was founded upon the cult of divinity upon which had been grafted Jewish and Christian enhancements of its sacredness.⁸⁹

No better illustration of the syncretic nature of the Ethiopian culture is to be found than in the structure of Amharic, the official language of Ethiopia. According to the predominant view, Amharic is a Semitic language, directly derived from Geez, the liturgical language. Linguistic studies, however, have revealed that in many aspects, and most importantly in the syntax,

Amharic presents a truly un-Semitic appearance. The syntax is much more like Oromo, Somali, Welamo and other languages of neighboring Cushitic and Omotic groups than it is like Tigrinya, Giiz, or Classical Arabic.⁹⁰

Ethiopia being the land of all sorts of syncretism and mixture, the attempt to distinguish the exclusively Semitic from the exclusively Cushitic finds no basis. This state of manifold merger can only be labeled "Ethiopian." In vain, then, do scholars try to detect the work of outsiders in this amalgamated ensemble, the more so when they seek evidence of racist practices. However harsh and oppressive the southern conquest may have been, it has never instituted anything resembling a racial barrier. Granted that the conquest has been ruthless, granted that it brought about expropriation of land and discriminatory systems of land tenure, granted all of this and more, the fact remains that the system "did not legalize racism and segregation and attendant inequalities, typically associated with Western colonialism."⁹¹ Rather, so open was the system that a great number of individuals from the conquered populations rose quickly to positions of power, some reaching the peak. To tell the truth, the desire for assimilation was too zealous, as it moved quickly and resolutely towards Ethiopianization by demanding the adoption of Amharic and Orthodox Christianity.

To be sure, the northerners pandered to a feeling of superiority whose inspiration was cultural rather than racial. It resembled more the precapitalist

forms of conquest, which always justified expansion by cultural superiority of one kind or another. Thus it moved away from erecting a racial barrier, insofar as cultural superiority is by definition bound to wither away through acculturation and social mobility. What differentiated qualitatively the southern conquest from European colonialism was this open, even harassing appeal to assimilation. Thus promoted, Ethiopianization may well have amounted to cultural oppression, but never to the European type of colonization (which, however broad its policies of acculturation, never authorized individuals to cross the threshold of the color bar).

Those Ethiopians who tend to overlook the nature of European colonialism would be well advised to recall what the Italian conquest of Eritrea and Ethiopia looked like. According to Bereket Habte Selassie, the only difference between Menelik's conquest of the south and the Italian annexation of Eritrea was that "while Menelik's Ethiopia was a feudal state that placed a feudal ruling class over its conquered peoples . . . Italy was a budding bourgeois nation-state."⁹² Apart from this, both were imperial territories—the one African, the other European—equally forcing their language and political culture on the conquered peoples. He forgets one thing: its "aim" being "to preserve the purity of the white race in East Africa," the Italian policy rejected "the doctrine of assimilation as both false and dangerous."⁹³ Neither does he tell us how the concrete application of this theory led to the prohibition of "all relationships with native women," and to "the complete separation of the Italian and the native residential quarters," entailing "the exclusion of Ethiopians from cinemas, parks, etc."⁹⁴

Most importantly, Bereket does not associate the early rise of nationalist feelings among the educated Eritreans to the segregationist practice of Italian colonialism. Still less does he relate how naturally this nationalism led them to identify their struggle with the survival of Ethiopia perceived both as their national reference and as the goal of their struggle. Such was, for instance, the case of Gebre Egziabher Gilay. After having been a faithful servant of the Italians, who honored him with the Ethiopian title of *Blatta*, he ended up antagonizing them through his secret and extensive connections with the Ethiopian authorities. Tried for treason and put in jail, he escaped and joined Menelik's court. There he became an important advisor to the Emperor, whom he looked upon as the embodiment of the new state, able to promote—beyond ethnic politics—the "unity against Italy in the name of historical tradition."⁹⁵ His anti-colonialism was thus transformed into an Ethiopian nationalism, couched as it was in terms of

a defiant Ethiopia which, in facing up to European countries, was called upon to model itself on the newly industrialized state of Japan.⁹⁶ Gebre Egziabher was not alone in undergoing national rebirth. The same anti-colonialism explains "the prominent role played by the Eritrean educated elite in the course of war," a trend which "was later carried over to the Unionist movement as well."⁹⁷ Clearly, Ethiopia had become the symbol and source of identification of anti-colonial struggle. Those who had really tested the true nature of European colonialism, those who therefore knew the difference between Ethiopian "feudalism" and European occupation, could hardly escape the hold of nationalism wedded to the cause of Ethiopia.

As concerns those Ethiopian scholars who increasingly succumb to the spell of ethnic nationalism, one detects behind the democratic language of this evolution a devolution imparted by a process of cultural alienation resulting from ill-gotten Westernization and its subsequent maladjustment or underdevelopment. We know how ingrained is the tendency of African intellectuals to pose the problems of Africa in terms of concepts borrowed from European scholars and experiences. A pertinent example is the concept of class, which nurtured all the illusions about class struggle and socialism in Africa. The Ethiopian case is the first attempt of ethnic nationalism to translate ethnic differences and hostilities into a colonialist language suitable to European categories. Ethiopian history is read from the perspective of colonial history, just as post-colonial regimes in Africa are analyzed in terms of class struggle between workers and peasants on the one hand and the petty bourgeoisie and the comprador class on the other.

What more is needed to activate the colonialist interpretation than the scenario of Cushitic peoples dominated by a racially and culturally different minority? The step is then short from Ethiopia to South Africa,⁹⁸ the Semitic Christian "minority" being to the Cushitic peoples what the white minority was to the Black populations of South Africa. In vain does one attempt to dispel the grossness of this parallel by recalling that in the case of Ethiopia "above all, they [the Semites] are indisputably indigenous."⁹⁹ The damage is done, and the Eurocentric reading of Ethiopian history and society can grasp no other forms of conflict than those related to race. No wonder, then, that Western analysts decipher Ethiopian history only through categories familiar to Eurocentrism, such as racial distinction and superiority, civilizing mission, acculturation, colonialism, etc.

This racist interpretation, in a sense understandable on the part of Western students of Ethiopia, becomes alarming when indigenous scholars (whose culture admits other ways of construing conquest and domination) give themselves over to Eurocentric categories. This borrowed mentality can only further complicate the issue to the point of rendering it unsolvable. African history is replete with ethnic conflicts of all sorts. The rise of great empires based on ethnic domination is neither a recent phenomenon nor something peculiar to Ethiopia. However pervasive and acute these conflicts may have been, never in their long history have Africans come anywhere near to developing racist doctrines, still less an evolutionary scheme ranking human beings. Such mentality is so alien to any African type of thought that the superiority of one's own ethnic group over others, however haughtily expressed, never posited anything resembling the Western notion of race. This confinement of Africa to kinship distinctions rules out the establishment of evolutionary stages between human beings and societies. Since the Abyssinian or Ethiopian conquest lacked the theoretical and ideological concepts which justified and backed the European adventure, its identification with European colonialism is at best an unconscious projection of European history on Ethiopia, at worst a deliberate attempt to entangle the country in a problem for which it has no solution.

A dramatic illustration of the muddle created by the colonial theory is in the ramblings of Tsenay Serequeberhan, an Eritrean intellectual, in his book *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy*. He begins by defining European colonialism by its distinctive theoretical feature, to wit, the ideology of racism. It is, he says, "the blatant denial of the humanity of the colonized" and "the affirmation that the colonized have no history and are introduced into the human community by European conquest."¹⁰⁰ In its everyday application, "the colonized is constantly reminded of his place; in this divided world no one can break the boundaries with impunity."¹⁰¹ He gives examples: apartheid South Africa, British Kenya, French Algeria, the Portuguese colonies and, interestingly, Italian Eritrea. But here he comes brandishing the concept of "African colonialism"¹⁰² to portray the Ethiopian situation.

The right to coin new concepts or to extend the meaning of previous ones belongs to everyone, provided the operation is intellectually meaningful and enlightening. Otherwise it turns into a fraudulent undertaking aimed at sowing confusion. Indeed, the conspicuous absence in Ethiopia

of the slightest practice reminiscent of colonial racism obliges our author to exclude the Ethiopian rulers from the European type of colonizer. He even admits that Eritrea was the victim of such a colonialism only when it was under the Italian rule. So his conclusion should concede the inappropriateness of the concept of colonialism for the case of Ethiopia: besides the absence of racist ideology and practice, the Amhara, the so-called colonizers, far from denying the humanity and historicity of the "colonized" peoples, openly pride themselves on being the true heir to the Aksumite civilization with which Eritrea is identified. There is no place for the notion of intruder.

What, then, can the idea of "African colonialism" designate? Maybe the domination of one ethnic group by another is all that is left. But no one has ever used such a notion to characterize similar phenomena in other African countries. Let us not beat about the bush: since without the notion of Ethiopian colonialism, the Eritrean armed struggle would have been content with the establishment of a democratic system, the purpose of said notion is less to reflect the true situation than to create an amalgam according to which, the Ethiopians having replaced the Italians, the struggle for independence must continue. But there is more: a colonial power *vis-à-vis* Eritrea, Ethiopia also maintains "semi-colonial relationships"¹⁰³ with the people of Ogaden and Oromia. Why is the relationship with the Oromo people semi-colonial while that with Eritrea, the cradle of Ethiopian civilization, is fully colonial? The concept is treated so arbitrarily that it stinks of manipulation. The more so when the same author, who had stigmatized Senghor and African thinkers for using "Eurocentric descriptions,"¹⁰⁴ is guilty of the same failing in his depiction of Ethiopian realities.

Likewise, we need to understand why some Western students of Ethiopia, while knowing how much Ethiopia had in common with the southern and neighboring peoples, saw fit to speak of Ethiopia as "the only African colonial power,"¹⁰⁵ as though the southern march were for Ethiopia an overseas conquest. Ethiopia shared with the southern peoples a comparable level of technology; it certainly was in no position to simulate the enormous "gap" which separated Europe from Africa. Nor did it foster an evolutionary theory by which such a gap was couched in terms of racial types. If the colonial appendage is intended to make the Ethiopians feel un-African by infecting them with the Western type of racism, the advice is neither welcome nor its follow-up foreseeable. If it means to underline

the particularity of Ethiopian history, well and good, provided that it leaves the colonialist language to the colonizers.

Or else must we attribute the imputation of colonial design to a persistent grudge against Ethiopia's successful resistance to colonialism? This would certainly accord with the intention of the original designer of the colonial thesis. We saw how, in order to undermine the unity of Ethiopia, colonial powers concocted the thesis of Amhara colonization of Ethiopian peoples. Indeed, nothing could be more damaging and debunking than the image of the Ethiopians participating in the scramble, colonizing their own African brothers, and (thanks to this unspeakable crime) securing their freedom. The depiction of Ethiopia as a partner in Western colonialism—whereas, in actuality, Ethiopian nationalism owes much of its fervor to the victory of Adwa and its successful resistance to colonialism—is an outrageous distortion of the truth.

It logically follows that Ethiopia's achievement of a form of nationalism based on historical reality and supra-ethnic consciousness must also fall apart. It too must fall prey to ethnic conflict, that legacy of colonialism that still exasperates African political life. When the Ethiopians themselves start echoing the debunking interpretation of their history, then the proof is given that even the only African country to successfully avoid colonization could not escape the fate of ethnic divisions. The abnormality, the exception of Ethiopia was to be a short-lived escapade, confirming even more the ineradicable ascendancy of ethnic limitation over African mentality. Once victims of ethnic manipulation, Africans would become its promoters.

FACTUAL IMPEDIMENTS TO THE COLONIAL PARADIGM

At this point, certain factual considerations may give more weight to our argumentation. The view making the southern conquest into an exclusive Amhara—even a Shewan—conquest is a serious factual misreading. So sizeable was the Oromo participation in the conquest that Greenfield called its outcome "the Shewan Galla Confederation."¹⁰⁶ Indeed,

many Galla leaders, through the influence of Gobena, had thrown in their lot with Menelik and indeed their followers formed the basis for the expansion of Shewa which Menelik and Gobena planned. Obviously it is wrong to describe this period as an extension of 'Amhara' influence and control, though this mistake is of-

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ten made. One of the first to join was Biratu Golé, leader of the Meta Galla from beyond Wachacha, the vast volcano immediately west of Addis Ababa.¹⁰⁷

The notion of "Amhara Galla Confederation" appears so viable that one author interpreted the defiance of the Shewan aristocracy of Yohannes's authority as a proof that it even "struggled for its independence against" the north.¹⁰⁸

Because theoreticians have a one-sided view on the conquest, they barely undertake the serious study of the conquest. Mohammed Hassen, an Oromo historian, in addition to recognizing that "Menelik's conquest of the Oromo of southwestern parts of what is today Ethiopia was accomplished by Gobena, who was himself of Oromo origin,"¹⁰⁹ suggests, if only between the lines, that Menelik himself may have been instrumental to those Oromo leaders who toyed with the idea of unifying the Oromo people. In not allowing continuity of political rule beyond the ascribed limit of time, the *Gada* system had prevented unification. Neither the rise of a unifier nor the buildup of a state machinery to effect the unification was possible given the constraints of the system. Service to Menelik was therefore a way of circumventing the difficulty. All those who wish to see the truth should concede the extent to which the imperial power of Ethiopia was necessary to bring the Oromo people under one state.

Instead of this promising approach, most scholars prefer the well worn and inaccurate view presenting Gobena and all his followers as mere mercenaries, "colonial troops" serving the colonial design of Menelik. However close the partnership and political alliance between Menelik and Gobena may have been, the latter becoming one of the most powerful men of the regime, the prevailing view is one of assault on the Oromo people by the Amhara troops of Menelik with the aid of hired Oromo mercenaries. *Nothing is likely to change even if, besides Ras Gobena and his followers, many individuals from other conquered peoples have risen to power. Yet these ascents do not recall anything like the colonial use of indigenous troops, any more than they resemble the system of indirect rule. For instance, take the case of Fitawrari Habte Giorgis and Dejazmach Balcha. At first prisoners of war and slaves at Menelik's court, they ended up becoming so powerful that both, and especially Habte Giorgis, became the king-makers of Ethiopia.*

Who ever heard of a case of indirect rule that gave indigenous peoples access to the colonial ruling elites, let alone granting them the power to

influence political life? All this invites us not to conceive of the southern march in terms of conquest and subjugation alone, but also in terms of an internal process of rapprochement by indigenous forces thanks to the opportunities created by Western intrusions. In this sense, Menelik, rather than being a colonizer, is comparable to the great political unifiers¹¹⁰ who have appeared so rarely on the world historical scene.

The notion of a Shewan-Oromo confederation would cease to be surprising had scholars paid enough attention to the facts of Ethiopian history. This course of thinking was chiefly obstructed by a kind of conspiracy on the part of most Ethiopian as well as Western scholars to downplay, if not totally ignore, the role played by the Oromo in the history of Ethiopia. In this frame of thinking, Menelik's conquest of the south could not but appear as a sudden move, all inspired and made possible by circumstances related to European colonialism. Yet when these same historians write the history of Ethiopia or of the Oromo people, they are unable to speak of the one without constantly referring to the other as early as the sixteenth century.

The active intervention of the Oromo in the history of Ethiopia and their first contribution to its survival date back to Gragn's invasion. The Oromo expansion "came between the Christian and Muslim rivals, gave the Christians a much-needed breathing space, and broke the Muslim attack."¹¹¹ Even though the act was not intentional, it showed how mistaken is the attempt to write Ethiopian history from the sixteenth century onwards without including the Oromo contribution. Their vast expansion in the south and deep infiltration into the north provided "a far-flung cultural corridor through which the multifarious peoples of Greater Ethiopia could more readily be connected."¹¹² In other words, the political and cultural continuum of Ethiopia is perforce realized through the mediation of the Oromo, a fact which inflates the syncretic character of Ethiopia.

The increasing political influence of the Oromo on the Ethiopian society was built up via military services. Since the sixteenth century, Ethiopian emperors relied more and more on Oromo military enrollments, which provided "praetorian guards who formed an important part of the imperial army."¹¹³ A point was reached at which military victories depended heavily on the control of Oromo cavalry. Emperor Susenyos was the first to accede to the imperial throne thanks to his Oromo connection. His marriage with an Oromo princess ensured him the support of a large Oromo cavalry, which enabled him to consolidate power. It also bound up

the destiny of the Oromo with Ethiopia as, henceforth, "the blood of the Solomonic line mingled with that of the newcomers."¹¹⁴ The assimilation was not confined to the imperial family; it acquired a broader scope as the large Oromo units of Susenyos's army were "settled . . . in various parts of his domain."¹¹⁵

The political influence of the Oromo reached its peak with the rise of what has been called "the Galla dynasty."¹¹⁶ It achieved supremacy during the Era of the Princes when Wollo leaders began to control the monarchs in Gonder. Their cultural influence was no less important, as Oromo became "the language of the court."¹¹⁷ In short, such was their influence that, as Abir says, "had it not been for the fact that the Galla themselves lacked a unifying 'ideology', the country would have passed altogether into the hands of the Galla immigrants."¹¹⁸ Even though this possibility did not materialize, the importance of the Wollo Oromo has never decreased. Up to Haile Selassie's regime, no important event, whether accession to the imperial throne or circumstances related to the defense of Ethiopia, occurred without the active participation of the Wollo Oromo. That the only actors of Ethiopian history are still believed to be the Amhara and Tigre is a matter for great perplexity.

The case of Shewa is even more intricate. Prolonged proximity has resulted in such a thorough mixture that the question as to who is purely Amhara and who purely Oromo is often futile. The safest affirmation is to say that "the whole Shewan population has long been enriched by Galla blood."¹¹⁹ Probably the same applies to Gojjam,¹²⁰ so that, with perhaps the exception of Tigre, no part of northern Ethiopia can claim to be immune from Oromo influence and descent. If anything, this high degree of assimilation sharply contradicts the view of the defenders of the colonial thesis concerning the Amhara reluctance to assimilation,¹²¹ and disproves their attempt to draw a cultural and racial barrier between the south and the north. Only the obsessive need to justify the colonial thesis at all costs inspires such a flagrant distortion.

This process of assimilation enables us to place the southern conquest in its proper context: it was a way of resolving the anomaly of the Oromo already playing an important role inside Ethiopia while still pushing from without. Their inclusion was like knocking down a wall already largely fissured on both sides. What separated the Oromo from the Amhara had grown artificial to the point of making their separate existence frankly ab-

surd. Those who manage to read in this situation the image of European colonial conquest should come up with new facts and arguments.

Other facts, too, militate against the alleged colonial annexation. For instance, not all regions of the south were conquered by violent means, nor were they all disrupted. One such was the region of Wellega, "included in Menelik's empire, but left with considerable autonomy, under the self-administration of local leaders who were recognized as Menelik's representatives."¹²² True, just because force was not used and local leaders were not displaced, it does not automatically mean that the conquest was not colonial. We raise the issue to underline the original spirit of the conquest, which was out to install the northern "tributary" system in the south. Acceptance of submission entailed the preservation of the local system. Jimma was thus spared disruption consequent on Aba Jifar's submission. Not until the consolidation of Haile Selassie's rule was Jimma placed "under Amhara rule with an Amhara garrison."¹²³ Even when force was used, disruption was kept to a minimum through the prompt promotion of local leaders to political positions.

Accordingly, if the original relation, which was undeniably and necessarily "tributary," progressively gave way to a different system, the blame should be put not on the conquest itself, but on the intervention of other factors during the phase of consolidation and organization. Though diversion of the southern territories to a different course occurred after the conquest, most scholars pay little attention to this fact and prefer to speak in global and unhistorical terms. In so doing, they miss the moment of Ethiopia's insertion into the world capitalist economy. The insertion altered the system in the south and, at the same time, the fate of Ethiopia.

Perhaps the most important fact opposing the colonial thesis is the very survival of Ethiopia. So far we have only insisted on the role played by the material resources of the south in securing the survival of Ethiopia. Yet the human resource was no less important. The direct military participation of the southern peoples in the defense of Ethiopia was not a token contribution. Individuals from the south were already among Menelik's best generals. During the reign of Haile Selassie the participation increased, to acquire an epic turn during the five years of Italian occupation.

Contrary to expectations and despite intense propaganda, few groups among the southern populations welcomed the Italians as liberators. Yet what pains the Italians took to coax the southern peoples! Land was redistributed and the *gebar* system eliminated. Amharic was replaced by Ara-

bic, Oromo, and Kaffa languages. Even so, the only noticeable support came from a few Muslim communities. The oppressive policy of Haile Selassie on religious matters pushed these communities to collaborate in exchange for "the Italian government's support of their religion and institutions."¹²⁴

One would expect an empire the half of which groaned under an oppressive colonial rule to collapse at the very approach of the Italian "liberators" who, as one apologist of the colonial thesis put it, "were less oppressive than the Ethiopians."¹²⁵ On the contrary, the Italians never succeeded in dismissing "Oromo's lack of commitment to the colonial ruler," nor even in preventing some from being "drawn into the guerrilla war of the Patriots against the Italians."¹²⁶ Already the strength of the empire was surprising, as many observers had predicted that on Menelik's death "the entire empire would collapse."¹²⁷ The prediction did not come to pass, despite the anarchy and the fierce struggle for succession which followed Menelik's death and even culminated in a bloody civil war. Surprise turned into enigma when the Ethiopian state, though smashed by the Italian army, revived through widespread and stubborn patriotic resistance. A famous participant in this resistance was Geressu, an Ethiopian patriot of Oromo origin, who at times was in command of "an army of 52000."¹²⁸ A fascinating epic if ever there was one, not only because of Geressu's own military quality and leadership, propelled by a courage defying imagination, but because of the support the Oromo people provided to the cause of Ethiopian survival. As he himself said, the Italians had such a hard time *with him* "because all the country rose and rebelled."¹²⁹ Without the active support of the population in the regions in which he was operating, his saga would have been unthinkable.

THE REAL MEANING OF THE SOUTHERN EXPANSION

Enough has been said thus far to seriously challenge the colonial thesis. The way is clear for discussing the true objective and nature of the southern expansion. An important point of departure is the suggestion that the expansion can be conceptualized in terms of Ethiopian traditional politics. Expansion being inherent in the system, the availability of firearms was bound to present the south as a natural target. The rivalry between Yohannes and Menelik was also an important factor. Yohannes's superiority in firearms certainly drove Menelik to opt for a policy of conquest by which he

could hope "to increase his revenue for the purchase of expensive modern weapons."¹³⁰ A point deserving consideration is the claim of lost territories during Gagn's invasion. It was forcefully expressed by Menelik: "I shall endeavour, should God of His grace grant me the years and the strength, to restore the ancient frontiers of Ethiopia as far as Khartoum and to Lake Nyanza beyond the lands of the Galla."¹³¹ All these factors indicate how realistic is the attempt to relate the southern conquest to the internal needs of the Ethiopian system.

Relevant though these factors may seem *vis-à-vis* the internal politics of Ethiopia, they are not sufficient to account for the southern expansion. They need to be placed in the unprecedented context created by European colonialism. In the foregoing analysis of the colonial thesis, the depiction of Ethiopia as a rival of European powers constantly cropped up. The image, if not false, is surely overstated. Strange indeed is the notion of Ethiopia as a rival while it was itself under the threat of colonial domination. The view is often vindicated by Menelik's own statement: "If Powers at a distance come forward to partition Africa between them, I do not intend to remain an indifferent spectator."¹³² Not being a nationalist guerrilla leader, scarcely can we imagine Menelik expressing his policy in terms other than the imperial language of conquest and rivalry. On closer inspection, however, he was deeply concerned, if not alarmed, by the menace of European colonialism to Ethiopia. What could be more threatening than the growing encirclement of Ethiopia on all its borders? Menelik's hesitation and efforts to avoid war against Italy clearly manifested his awareness of the strength of colonial powers. To think that he was so confident as to visualize himself as a challenger would be naive. The battle of Adwa was not a battle for competition, but for survival. The real rivalry was between the colonial powers, and purely as such it favored Ethiopia. In any event, the admission of rivalry is the recognition that Ethiopia was a target. More than anybody else, Menelik was perfectly aware of this.

What, then, prevents us from deriving the southern expansion from an anti-colonial rather than a colonial motive? Gebru Tareke shares this view:

What inspired the powerful men to embark on a course of state consolidation was partly the perception that 'national' survival was being threatened by a combination of powerful forces unleashed by the expansionist impulses of the European economy and religious fanaticism in the Horn.¹³³

Insofar as the resources made available by the conquest enabled Menelik to build the strong army with which the colonial powers had to reckon, the policy was undeniably efficient.

Significant facts support this interpretation. Let us begin by dismissing the view according to which the southern march was Yohannes's original idea. Because Yohannes was too occupied in containing the Egyptian and Italian forces in the north, he was unable to realize "the broader ideal of the incorporation of large tracts of land historically part of Ethiopia and still more closely linked to the Empire than to any other powerful state."¹³⁴ Accordingly, he assigned Menelik the task of expanding the empire to the south. In so doing, he was also diverting Menelik from the power struggle which threatened the unity of the empire.

One thing is sure: Yohannes was quite busy fighting invading forces in the north. Moreover, one cannot ascribe the idea of the southern expansion to him without coming up against his basic policy. He and Tewodros were essentially concerned with reducing Oromo and Islamic influences on the north, let alone adding new territories. As both blamed the episode of the Era of the Princes on these influences, they sought to reinforce the unity and strength of the country by the revival of the traditional religious and imperial commitments rather than by the inclusion of new territories. Their policy of forced conversion to Christianity, especially Yohannes's "attempt to impose a religion by political means,"¹³⁵ were not particularly propitious for the incorporation of new peoples.

By contrast, a different policy was taking root in Shewa long before Menelik. This fact sufficiently indicates the precedence of the idea of expansion to that of the European partition of Africa. Expansion, then, emanated from the imperial ambition of the Shewan dynasty. In claiming to be the legitimate representative of the Solomonic line, the Shewan aristocracy was naturally inclined toward a policy of expansion designed to upgrade its power. Thus, Sahle Selassie's policy of "expansion to the south and south-west" was a means to realize his "secret hopes of becoming the emperor of the united Ethiopian empire."¹³⁶ What was remarkable about this expansion was the change of policy with which it was accompanied. By abandoning the traditional attitude of pushing back the Oromo and replacing them with Amhara settlers, "Sahle Selassie enthusiastically took up the realistic policy of Wossen Segged of complete tolerance to Islam, and of Amharizing, Christianizing, and integrating his Galla subjects within the kingdom."¹³⁷

This change of policy, at first impelled by the needs of internal politics, prepared the ground for the southern march, even making it necessary as the danger of colonialism grew. Unlike northern leaders, who were still thinking in terms of containing Oromo and Islamic influences, the Shewan aristocracy opted for a policy of incorporation. This change qualified it for realizing expansion and initiated Menelik's policy of raising to "high office Galla from newly conquered regions."¹³⁸ The apex of this policy was Menelik's choice "as his fourth wife the formidable Empress Taitu, who was of Galla origin and commanded the loyalty of large sections of the Galla."¹³⁹ The practice of raids on Oromo territories was exchanged for that of conquest with the clear goal of integration. Simultaneously, among some Oromo chiefs close to the Shewan aristocracy, as was Gobena, the idea of uniting the Oromo people through an alliance with the Shewan aristocracy had made its way. Consequently, the southern conquest was the outcome of the encounter between internal factors proper to Ethiopia in general and to the Shewan aristocracy in particular and the international situation created by the scramble for Africa. What originally was an expansion of limited scale, just enough to secure the imperial throne, turned into an all-out and frantic expansion at the sight of creeping colonial encirclements.

So conceived, the southern expansion fits into the general theme of Ethiopian survival. If, as this book is set out to show, Ethiopia's main and permanent ethos is survival, the ups and downs of its history being nothing more than the manifestations of a stubborn will to endure, then we can confidently assert that so important and radical a change of course as the southern march must be attributable to the survival ethos. Thus the Ethiopian inspiration of the southern expansion becomes tangible, and thus not colonization, whether dependent or sovereign, but the need to *counter* colonialism explains the southern march.

That is why the attribution of a colonial intent, even in the expansionistic sense, always remains an inadequate discourse. As Ethiopia never had the needs of European capitalism, neither did it have the excess of power which propelled traditional empire-building of the type of Rome or Russia. Traditional as well as industrialized forms of colonization have often drawn their annexationist policy from an excess of strength. In the case of Ethiopia, not excess but deficiency triggered its expansion, since its purpose was to make up for the enormous technological gap existing between the threatening colonial powers and the modicum means of the

Ethiopian ethos of survival. Nor is the comparison of Amhara settlers to European migrants in search of a new life a defensible position. The Amhara were far from being impregnated with a migrant spirit. They were even farther from the very idea of institutional innovation that would have enabled them to conceive of a colonial administration. These considerations cast doubt on Uri Almagor's proposal that

Ethiopian conquest of the far south created an extended political unit whose nature suggests, at least to my mind, the imperialism practised in the ancient world—especially in the Middle East—rather than other forms of colonization.¹⁴⁰

Almagor is led to think thus by the absence in the south of anything resembling "the centre-periphery relations"¹⁴¹ so characteristic of European colonialism. Though Ethiopia was an empire, it avoided establishing a structure whereby the center, absorbing surplus from peripheries, underdevelops them to its exclusive advantage. This still does not eradicate the difference pertaining to the excess of force inherent in the expansion of traditional empires. A parallel between a state emerging from a situation of extreme weakness and anarchy—due to the Era of the Princes—and traditional empires grossly exaggerates the Ethiopian strength. Let it not be forgotten that neither a new religious fervor nor a conquering social organization, usually characteristic of expanding empires, was to be found in Ethiopia.

The only compelling force to be taken into consideration at that time was the traditional ethos of survival. Nothing resembling the impetus of a new religion (as was so often the case with the great empires of the ancient world) nor the mystique of science (if such we call the European drive to conquer the world) suffused Menelik's conquest of the south. Even a renewed vigor of traditional beliefs did not accompany the march. Dig as deeply as you may into the events and circumstances of the conquest, you will find no other urge than the traditional impetus to survival. Not surprisingly, apart from the policy of integrating the southern peoples, which was in the traditional line of Ethiopian expansion, Menelik's reign did not bring about any significant renovation of the religious, social, and political life of Ethiopia. What else could better show the inadequacy of comparing Menelik's march with the formation of empires in the ancient world than this absence of impetus to renovation and change?

No other choice is really left but to understand the southern expansion from the only drive at hand: survival. It ensured access to exportable resources to buy the much needed firearms and counter the threat of colonization. It also reinforced the defense capacity with the support of new peoples, as the north by itself was no match for the colonial powers. It was reasonable to assume that, given a sufficient degree of Ethiopianization both in terms of culture and elite formation, the newly conquered peoples would stand up for the defense of Ethiopia. Hence the hasty policy of Christianization as well as the imposition of the Ethiopian social and political system on the southern populations, all intended to accelerate the formation of a local gentry.

Menelik's land policy in the south, the *sisso* system, had two interrelated objectives. The one was the possibility of granting land to settlers and *gult* rights to warlords. In this way Menelik had at his disposal the equivalent of a standing army. Whether for the ordinary soldier or the *Ras*, land rights were wholly dependent on unconditional and permanent military service. Such was not the case in the north, where one could evoke communal rights to land regardless of military service. The true meaning of the *neftagna* system in the south was to subject land rights to military service and thus obviate the unconditional descent right to land prevailing in the north. The policy was but a modification of the traditional system itself since the landowner who was essentially a peasant and potentially a soldier gave way to the owner who was essentially a soldier. As evinced by *gult* rights, the ideal of the traditional system was to maintain the dependence of land rights on military duty.

The other purpose of the *sisso* system was to generate a local gentry, known as *balabat*, through imperial grants of tax rights. Traditional chiefs and all those who supported the conquest were Ethiopianized in the sense that their power and status no longer depended on lineage rights, but on military and political services to the Ethiopian state. As Gebru says,

by absorbing the traditional polities Menelik was able to construct a broader social base to the imperial state. The social makeup of the emerging Abyssinian ruling class was thus continually and profoundly being transformed. A new dominant class that was transethnic and transregional was definitely emerging parallel to the evolving state-society."¹⁴²

Sure enough, the more the new power and status of local chiefs and ambitious individuals were based on the Ethiopian land system, the greater was their determination to defend the imperial system. Put differently, Menelik could rely on the class solidarity generated by the *gebar* system. The pressing need for unity, while it disrupted the traditional systems of the south, planted at the same time the premises of class solidarity until intermarriages and deeper acculturation further fortified it.

Some scholars have—inconsistently—argued that Menelik should have refrained from upsetting the traditional systems and been content with tributary relations. But those kind of relations would not have fostered solidarity with the north and the imperial system. Only by making status and land holdings dependent on imperial grants could common class interests be created. In this way, the destinies of local chiefs, regional powers, and the imperial throne became intertwined.

Thus, the objective as well as the method of the southern expansion are consistent with the survival ethos. What some scholars have called the forced “feudalization” of the southern traditional elites corresponds exactly with what a country at bay would logically do to obtain the support of newly incorporated peoples. The transplantation in the south of the Ethiopian social system rapidly unleashed a drive similar to what Levine called the “overarching passion to rule”¹⁴³ characteristic of the Amhara mentality, thereby supplementing the new community of interests with the tendency to share values.

The rapidity of the integration leads us to ask whether force alone can properly account for the conquest and the incorporation. Not that force was not used, but rather it amounted to the liberation of a repressed impulse, less so to the institution of pure and simple subjugation. This is not the place to ruminate about the “community of values” running through the peoples of the Horn of Africa. Let us simply say that the success of the expansion, its resistance to numerous ordeals, as well as the enthusiasm and ambition that it aroused fully authorize an inquiry as to whether the expansion, as Levine puts it, “was basically a *subjugation of alien peoples or an ingathering of peoples with deep historical affinities.*”¹⁴⁴

A good illustration of the spirit of the southern march is furnished by the Eritrean intellectual, Gebre Egziabher, who conceptualized the position and role of Ethiopia in the world dominated by imperialism. At first look, Gebre Egziabher seems to explode our thesis. The great sin of Menelik is, according to him, “to have abolished the existing boundaries and to

have negotiated with foreigners."¹⁴⁵ Negotiations meant the acceptance and legalization of the Italian claim over Eritrea. Because of this, Gebre Egziabher called Menelik "King of Kings of the Galla and of half of Ethiopia."¹⁴⁶ What could be more damaging to our attempt to understand the southern expansion as an anti-colonialist drive than this fact of Menelik negotiating the occupation of Eritrea?

If our thesis is not to lose all credibility, an explanation of Menelik's position is in order. So why did not Menelik crown his victory at Adwa by throwing the Italians out of Eritrea? If objective reasons can be found for Menelik's reluctance to pursue his victory up to Eritrea, the objection of Gebre Egziabher will appear an understandable grudge that does not undermine our thesis.

For the majority of scholars, the main reason for Menelik's failure to oust the Italians from Eritrea¹⁴⁷ stems from the fact that such a move would have jeopardized his victory at Adwa. The Italians were entrenched in heavy fortifications from which it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge them—not to mention the exacerbating effect of such attacks on Italian national pride: any additional humiliation would have compelled Italy to send a larger military force. The problem of supply would have been no less pressing, as pursuit would mean penetrating into a poor and ravaged territory. Some add the argument that Menelik may not have wanted to have more Tigreans in his empire in view of their doubtful loyalty to him.

The weakness of these arguments is that they contradict other known facts. Menelik's victory was so devastating that the Italians were not in a moral and material position to pose any serious resistance. The problem of supply was also worrying them. Most importantly, there is Gebre Egziabher's confidence in the readiness of the Eritreans to rise up against the Italian colonial rule. This would have greatly facilitated Menelik's march on Eritrea, where he would have been greeted as a liberator. Even if we discard this possibility, it was in Menelik's power to undermine the Italian position by supporting materially and morally the Eritrean resistance. Menelik did nothing of the sort; instead, he signed a treaty with Italy recognizing its colonial right, thereby justifying those Eritreans who reproached him for having "sold" them to the Italians. Above all, let us not say that independence being secured, "the essential object of the war had been won,"¹⁴⁸ Menelik should have known—probably he did—two things: first, that Eritrea would serve "as a launching pad to invade Ethiopia"¹⁴⁹;

second, that the independence of Ethiopia was illusory so long as it had no access to the Red Sea. In short, Menelik's reluctance to liberate Eritrea was morally and militarily unjustified and strategically mistaken. The supposition that Menelik "did not want to risk the hard-won victory by pursuing the Italians"¹⁵⁰ lacks clear-sightedness, as the 1935 Fascist invasion of Ethiopia will testify.

Paradoxically, the more these reasons are argued, the less they convince us. At bottom we know that Menelik's options were few: his power being limited, his victory was indeed hard-won. Doubtless, he was materially in a position to throw the Italians out of Eritrea. But what would such a victory mean? That henceforth Menelik will have to stand by himself, not only against the Italians, but also against the British and the French, since dislodging the Italians would be tantamount to challenging the status quo in the Horn of Africa. Let us not forget that the weapons by which he defeated the Italians were bought from the colonial powers themselves. In no way could he have succeeded in preserving the independence of Ethiopia without accepting the game and rules of the scramble. He could use the scramble to his advantage, but he could not contest it altogether. No single non-Western country could so behave as to reject all compromise with colonial powers. Even Japan had to accept "the treaty port system" which imposed "a number of commercial and political disabilities" such that the position of Japan was but "semi-colonial."¹⁵¹

We arrive at the heart of the matter. Owing to the overwhelming superiority of the colonial powers, non-Western countries, which had not yet lost their independence, were cowed into a choice at once tragic and ironic. They could preserve their independence only through the assistance of those powers which were threatening them. Whether one liked it or not, firearms and technology had to come from the West. And this put a severe limitation on the capacity of non-Western countries to confront colonial powers. These countries had no other choice than to indulge in a delicate, balancing, give-and-take policy. These conditions reveal the puerility of the theory of dependent colonialism: it discourses on everything save on the tragic situation of those countries which were not yet colonized.

Fortunately, Menelik knew the limit beyond which he could not antagonize the colonial powers. Excessive defiance meant isolation which, in turn, would herald the loss of independence. Since without Western assistance independence was scarcely defensible, survival hinged on the access to Western technology. Only Western firearms could stop Western colo-

nialism. Menelik could not at once throw the Italians out of Eritrea and obtain firearms from the West. Even if he understood how well Eritrea could serve as a launching pad to another invasion, there was nothing he could do about it. No sooner would he have reached the Eritrean coast than he would have found himself, no doubt more glorious, but on the verge of immediate collapse. In a word, he would be committing the error of Yohannes and Tewodros, both of whom craved for Western technology, yet refused to make the necessary concessions. More generally, the rejection of the scramble in the Horn would mean for Menelik the certainty of not being able to defend Ethiopia and his own throne much longer, as well as the injunction to lay aside his project of modernizing Ethiopia.

This explanation is not intended to remove the grudge of the Eritreans against Menelik. No justification of whatever kind can console a people for the loss of freedom. The grudge should remain but should gradually give way to understanding. This was, it seems to me, the evolution of Gebre Egziabher, who finally joined Menelik and became his advisor and a "fanatical supporter of the new idea of the great and free Abyssinian state."¹⁵² The spirit of the new expanded state is anti-colonialism, clearly defined by him as the "borders and territorial union against foreign domination."¹⁵³ Just as colonial conquests established new borders and political authorities, so anti-colonialism draws new borders by the union of the threatened peoples. Such a union is by definition supra-ethnic and a new form of nation-building. According to Gebre Egziabher, this reality has come into being in Ethiopia and its southern expansion.

Besides, Gebre Egziabher was not alone in thinking in this manner. All those early Ethiopian intellectuals who saw a parallel between Japan and Ethiopia have more or less shared his view. Nor was his perception confined to Ethiopian circles either; many Europeans gave credence to the interpretation of Ethiopia as an anti-colonial union of peoples. An European interpreter of Ethiopian politics had these words:

the final aim of their [Abyssinians] policy of antagonism to white races, in which they are relying on the co-operation of Japan, is nothing less than to act as the champion of all the coloured peoples of Africa."¹⁵⁴

But herein lies the Ethiopian enigma: once compared to Japan, now placed among the poorest nations of the world. Obviously, a renovating spirit never accompanied the expansion. Because of this, the southern expan-

sion soon took a degenerated course. Perhaps the theory of dependent colonialism can shed some light on this deviation. Not that the theory suddenly acquires viability, but because some factors pertaining to the deterioration of the Ethiopian state can be squeezed out of it.

A word of caution: the ethnic conflicts with which Ethiopia is now saddled originated not from the conquest itself, but from the divergent courses which split away the south from the north. The increasing differentiation took on an ethnic meaning, even lending itself to colonial interpretation. The institution of private property in the south, by throwing the door wide open to the creation of large estates and the appearance of tenancy, caused this development. The traditional Ethiopian system of landownership, most scholars agree, excluded private property as well as landless peasants. (See chapter III.) The economic power of the nobility was based on *gult* rights—i.e. on the right to tax land—and not on direct ownership. The original land policy of Menelik, the *sisso* system, was designed to introduce such *gult* rights, the only difference being that people who were ethnically different from the southern peoples were placed on top of the social hierarchy, whereas in the north no such ethnic disparity existed. The well-founded nature of this mixed system cannot be seriously disputed. It ensured control until deeper forms of integration and Ethiopianization became effective.

The real split occurred when *gult* holders in the south “managed to register the land and claim it in the form of ownership and reduce the cultivators to tenancy in the course of the twentieth century.”¹⁵⁵ Even though the progressive transformation of tax rights into private ownership of land had begun during Menelik’s time, after his death it was accelerated and legalized by Haile Selassie’s various land reforms. Thus, “tenancy emerged in the mid-1930s,”¹⁵⁶ it was generalized and perfected through successive measures until the land policy of 1966 openly decreed “the stark fact of irredeemable loss of land.”¹⁵⁷

If we now ask the question, Why did this evolution take place? the theory of dependent colonialism suggests that the answer lies in the progressive insertion of the Ethiopian economy into the world capitalist system. Let it be noted that the expropriation of land occurred after the conquest and according to a procedure akin to theft and swindle rather than to imposition of the indefeasible right of the conqueror. This trait alone tells a good deal about the non-colonial intention of the southern expansion.

What do I make of the difference between the south and the north, which is after all the main issue? The nature of the economic exchange with the capitalist world wholly accounts for the difference. As suggested earlier, what is called colonialism or dependent colonialism is none other than the fact of Ethiopia's progressive dependency or underdevelopment. Surely, the same system could not be introduced in the north on account of that region's disqualification as a dependent exporting economy. First, the traditional products of the north, consisting essentially of basic domestic materials, had no exportable value. Second, the density of population as well as the deterioration of land and its fragmentation would allow neither a major change of ownership nor a profitable concentration. Third, privatization and land extortion were made extremely difficult and politically risky by the northern system of communal holding.

None of these obstacles existed in the south. Exportable products such as coffee and gold were already being produced. Land was plentiful and most appropriate for cash crop products of whatever kind. Moreover, the ethnic difference made land extortion easier both ideologically and politically. The spur of land expropriation rapidly distilled the much needed conquistador mentality to justify expropriation. Put differently, side by side with the progressive penetration of capitalism—more precisely the progressive underdevelopment of Ethiopia—there emerged a form of ethnic mentality imbued with a sense of superiority. This ideological evolution had one single goal: to justify land appropriation and install the rights of private property. Unable to grow into a capitalist mentality, the traditional ethnic identity and provincialism were metamorphosed into a distorted equivalent of the modern outlook, broadcasting its superiority in default of being enterprising.

Given the needs of capitalist penetration, things could not have taken a different course. Through the rights of private property alone, large estates could be constituted and cash crop production imposed on peasants. The traditional tax right was no longer appropriate: the relations of production and the products themselves had to change in order to satisfy export needs based on raw materials. Expropriation of land, displacement of the producers, and the progressive transformation of the latter into landless peasants were necessary steps for the Ethiopian economy to be tied to the needs of international markets.

Capitalism was thus introduced in Ethiopia from the south. Understandably, the south was structurally and materially more conducive to

capitalist penetration. That warlords and their followers who used to live on tax rights were progressively transformed into a comprador class instead of becoming a national bourgeoisie, however, does not mean that the southern expansion was a colonial conquest. The process is sufficiently expressed by the familiar terms of dependency and underdevelopment, and does not require the hybrid concept of dependent colonialism. The ethnic issue is part and parcel of this underdevelopment. (More will be said on this in the final chapter.) The southern penetration of capitalism explains why the south is relatively more developed than the north. This development was not the result of capital investment, but of greater exposure to the needs of international markets.

In sum, the conversion by hook or by crook of traditional tax rights into private ownership of land is the price of inclusion of the Ethiopian economy into the world market. The ethnic paradigm facilitated this transition by providing the justifying ideology. Because of this transformation, the southern march, originally an anti-colonial union of peoples, took an unhealthy direction plunging the country into underdevelopment and its natural outcome, ethnic conflicts.

TAKING STOCK OF SURVIVAL

As indicated in the introduction, the achievements of the Ethiopian power of survival are quite impressive. Starting with the Aksumite period, which goes back to 1000 B. C. according to some estimates, the Ethiopian state has shown an amazing record of continuity, carried through by the rule of the same Solomonic dynasty. True, interruptions were not totally unknown. There is, for instance, the episode of the pagan queen, Gudit, who is said to have ravaged the Aksumite kingdom. However, the pagan rebellion of the Agew people did not last; at any rate, it was not an external invasion, but a short-lived internal uprising. A longer interruption of the Solomonic house was caused by the Agew dynasty (also known as the Zagwe kings), which lasted from 1137 to 1270. Even then, the Agew interlude was not, strictly speaking, an interruption. Christianized and completely integrated, the Zagwe acted more as faithful heirs to the state than as contenders. Their loyalty was such that, allegedly, they willingly abdicated the throne to its "legitimate" heir.

The greatest danger to the political continuity occurred in 1529, when Ahmed Gragn defeated Lebna Dingel. Having united Danakil and So-

mali forces in the spirit of *Jihad* and aided by a small contingent of Turkish soldiers using firearms, Gagn invaded the kingdom, hunting down the king and destroying everything in his path. However, supported by a small contingent of Portuguese troops, Lebna Dengel's successor, Galawdewos, defeated Gagn in 1541 and rapidly reconquered his kingdom, establishing his authority even in the frontier provinces of Bali, Doare, and Fatigar. Here again the continuity of the state was more or less maintained: the king was defeated, but had not submitted; nor was the state demolished and replaced by another one; nor was Gagn an outsider in the proper sense of the word.

The same can be said about the so-called Oromo invasion which started to put heavy pressure on the kingdom following the Muslim defeat. Though the Oromo movement was massive, it never reached the stage of becoming a serious danger, impaired as it was by Oromo internal divisions. Interestingly, parallel with the pressure there developed a process of settlement and integration, culminating in the rise of the Wollo dynasty. The Oromo pressure, indeed, is best characterized as a struggle to control state power rather than an attempt to destroy.

Admittedly, the pressure led to what is known as the Era of the Princes. Extending from 1769 to 1855, the period entailed a serious decline in the authority of emperors, who became little more than puppets in the hands of powerful regional rulers. The deep cause for the decline of the imperial institution is attributed to the rise of the Oromo dynasty, which, although having achieved ascendancy over Tigre and Amhara nobility, was yet unable "to provide the link which held the country together."¹⁵⁸ It contested the Solomonic legend without, however, proposing a substitute unifying ideology.

Characteristically, this period of anarchy was brought to an end by the rise of Tewodros, who fought for the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty. As the successors of Tewodros (namely, Yohannes, Menelik, and Haile Selassie) will all follow the line of restoration, we have indeed the image of a state which lasted 2.000 years without any serious interruption or disruption. In any case, whatever interruptions there were, they were not caused by external invading forces nor did they alter the nature of the state. No other state in the world can pride itself on having such an impressive record of continuity.

The cultural realm was no less characterized by continuity. Going back to the 4th century, Christianity has continued to be the dominant and

official religion of the country. The Ethiopian Church, along with the monophysite doctrine to which it adhered, has enhanced its national stature through the development of native characters and the systematic rejection of external influences. No better illustration of this resistance can be found than in the event pertaining to Jesuit attempts to overpower the Ethiopian Church. Backed by the renown of the Portuguese military expedition and encouraged by the conversion of King Susenyos to Catholicism, the Jesuits toyed for a time with the idea of winning over Ethiopia to Catholicism. That was to underestimate the Ethiopian Church: the threat of civil war led to the abdication of Susenyos and the expulsion of the Jesuits from Ethiopia.

Protestantism was even less successful than Catholicism. Judaism showed remarkable resistance, but never expanded its influence. The only religion which enjoyed expansion after Christianity was Islam. Compared to Protestantism and Catholicism, Islam has shown a relative degree of tolerance, despite its threats of aggression and encirclement. The reason why Catholicism appeared more dangerous to Ethiopian Christianity than Islam is yet to be explored. Islam, we can venture to say, exerted a wider attraction which was difficult to counter. Moreover, from the start it touched people involved in trade activities, thus lessening its hold on the elites and thereby its threat on the unity of state and Church.

Thus, the picture of the cultural realm definitely is one of continuity. None of the great religious events which have swept the world had serious repercussions in Ethiopia. Neither the rise and spread of Islam nor the ruptures of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation have had a disturbing impact on Ethiopian Christianity and its Church.

Remarkable also was the continuity of the socioeconomic makeup. The landholding system, called the *gebar* system (introduced we know not when), has remained intact right up to the 1960s. No social movement has ever altered the system and no method of cultivation other than the antiquated use of the ox-drawn plow has revolutionized the productive capacity. In sum, no significant change has affected the relations of production and the productive forces. Ethiopia is certainly one country where the Marxist notion of stage-producing-stage development was not implemented. The class distinction between the nobility and the peasantry, and below them craftsmen, has remained frozen. The merchant class has never succeeded in becoming so important as to inject some fluidity into the class composition. The organization of the Church, modeled on the society, was as static as its model.

Little wonder, then, if the concept of history, when applied to Ethiopia, is singularly devoid of all those exciting events besetting the history of other nations. Events related to the rise and fall of ruling dynasties and classes, to invasions bringing new beliefs and social models, to landmark discoveries and mental revolutions, are conspicuously absent from Ethiopian history. Not that (as with certain isolated societies in Africa and elsewhere) these events never reached Ethiopia. Quite the contrary: they have reached it more or less extensively, but—as though colliding with a carapace—they were unable to pierce through. In the context of Ethiopia, history is tantamount to preservation rather than to succession of events and changes.

Of great interest is the complete accordance of this conception of history with cultural exigency. The key to Ethiopian history being the mentality of its people, nothing profound about Ethiopia can be said unless survival is taken as a cultural prod. Scholars have noted—some with amazement, others with derision—that the Ethiopians consider themselves the elect of God. The founding myth of Ethiopian society and history, enshrined in the *Kibre Negest*, was based on the notion of divine election. Not to relate this notion with the record of survival is to miss the essential point. Only the perception of this relation can enable us to understand how profoundly the Ethiopian mentality was shaped by the idea of entrustment, of guardianship of the true faith, which is none other than Orthodox Christianity. The unity of Church and state, the social organization, and the commanding ideology were all organized in such a way as to serve the cause of survival, readily perceived as the fulfillment of God's assignment. The more new events and beliefs, such as Islam, the Reformation, etc., were upsetting and changing the world, the stronger became the sense of election, turning the survival of Ethiopia into the last refuge for the unaltered faith.

In view of this notion of guardianship, of "the sense of messianic purpose,"¹⁵⁹ the survival of Ethiopia was more than a consequence, a resultant; it was a stubbornly pursued goal. Unless this goal is accorded its proper place, the backwardness of Ethiopia will mask the success of its survival, often against powerful invaders. The intensity of the ethos of survival may have varied from epoch to epoch, but persistent it must have been for it to have registered such a protracted history of resistance. In particular, the survival of Ethiopia during the scramble for Africa, while it was facing invaders several times superior, may best illustrate the part played by the spirit of resistance born of the sense of entrustment.

To account for the survival of Ethiopia from the colonial partition, scholars have felt the necessity of invoking something other than sheer military impregnability. So wide was the material gap between Ethiopia and the colonial powers that its survival could not be reasonably assigned to heroic resistance alone. The likelihood of military defeat was a necessary assumption for all serious theorization of Ethiopia's survival. The question, then, shifts from how the Ethiopians vanquished colonialism to why the colonial powers failed to defeat them. In effect, such expressions as "miscalculations"¹⁶⁰ and "underestimation" are used to explain the European failure.

These errors of judgement have arisen from various sources. The most important one is "the ease with which Ethiopia had been invaded and conquered"¹⁶¹ by the British. Not to pay attention to the circumstances of Tewodros's defeat, namely to the total absence of unity and the isolation of the emperor, could deceive invaders into believing that the conquest of Ethiopia would require nothing more than a standard colonial military expedition. Another cause for miscalculations was the erroneous idea concerning the unity of Ethiopia: by giving too much importance to regional rivalries, the colonial powers took for granted that "all disunity and rivalry could be used by a foreign power against the integrity and independence of the Ethiopian state."¹⁶²

We thus get the picture of colonial powers sending unprepared, ill-commanded, and (most of all) numerically insufficient troops to conquer Ethiopia. Such was the case with the Egyptians and the Italians. Italy's defeats at Dogali and Adwa are clear illustrations of what is meant by underestimation. "Dogali," writes Marcus, "was an unnecessary defeat. The Italian military authorities had failed to appreciate the size and fire power of Ras Alula's force."¹⁶³ The conclusion drawn by an Italian observer is even more telling: "I see my country engaged in a war which will cost us millions and millions and a lot of men. Abyssinia will not be defeated with 20000 or 30000 men."¹⁶⁴ As to Adwa, the extent of the miscalculation was such that Fred Halliday does not hesitate to compare it with the French at Dien Bien Pu. Like the French, the Italians "did not believe that their opponent could move large numbers of troops across hundreds of miles of country to confront them."¹⁶⁵

Enough is not said on the importance of the size of the army. An invading army equal in size and fire to Ethiopia's own power was bound to fall into the trap of "encirclement and envelopment on open ground"¹⁶⁶

at which the Ethiopian army excelled. And there was no way by which the requirement of a large army could be averted, as the slightest incursion was bound to provoke the call for national emergency and general mobilization.

Granted the importance of miscalculations, still a broader conceptual framework seems necessary to account for the survival. For miscalculations do not tell why the two colonial super powers (Great Britain and France) refrained from embarking on the adventure while having a greater experience of colonial conquest. Furthermore, as it stands, the theory of miscalculation seems to do away with itself in implicating troops with lesser military might and colonial experience as were the Egyptian and Italian troops. Who were more likely to make those miscalculations than the Egyptian and Italian troops? The conclusion would then be: Ethiopia escaped from the scramble because of the clumsiness and unfitness of its would-be invaders; had France or Great Britain moved in, the outcome would have been different.

So the real question is why the two ablest and hungriest colonial powers did not complete the conquest of Ethiopia, once begun. As noted by one scholar:

True, these defeated representatives of imperialism, the armies of Ismail and the Italians, were weaker than the British or the French. But the latter had purposely refrained from dealing directly with Ethiopian reality: Twice during modern times, in 1868 and in 1941, British armies conquered Ethiopia's capitals, but in both occasions, they preferred to evacuate them and restore local independence.¹⁶⁷

In truth, as regards Italy, the judgment as to its weakness is not fair. Italy may have been weak by comparison with France or Britain, but this weakness translates into an overall superiority as soon as it measured against Ethiopia. Consideration should also be given to the fact that Italy had no other choice than to prey on Ethiopia, in view of Ethiopia being the only remaining independent country in Africa. The opportunity was too good not to be seized, so that what really needs serious explanation is the prudence of Great Britain and France.

The notion of underestimation will be pitched at the right level if it is wrapped up in a more general approach attributing the French and Brit-

ish hesitation to the clear calculation of the cost of conquest and occupation. A discussion of the scheme of colonial conquest is here necessary.

Before the turning point represented by the decade of the 1880s, European penetration into Africa had been limited. The shift to rapid annexation of vast territories is ascribed to the "advances in European medical technology" and in "military and industrial technology," which rendered "the conquest of any non-Western region cheaper than ever before,"¹⁶⁸ both in terms of expenses and loss of human life. The possibility of controlling malaria by the administration of prophylactic quinine and the invention of rifle easy to load were the chief elements in reducing the cost of conquest. Colonialism was not a military adventure in quest of glory and prowess, but a petty war against defenseless peoples. In so being, it was conditional on remaining cheap, especially as anti-imperialist sentiment in Europe was high. Thus, France "had a large parliamentary bloc opposed to empire"; in Great Britain, "Liberals were normally antiexpansionist, and official policy only reluctantly supported expansion during most of the years between 1880 and 1914."¹⁶⁹ Should colonial expeditions require extensive military operations because they were unfortunate enough to encounter pockets of resistance, increasing their human and material costs, the opposition would turn into a general outcry calling for interruption.

A clear illustration of this colonial precaution was the treaty port system enjoined by colonial powers on such countries as China and Japan. So unequal were the commercial and political conditions imposed on Japan and China that they were cowed into the status of semi-colonies. While ensuring favorable trade concessions and rights to foreigners, the policy fell short of being direct annexation, as for instance in India. The reason for this policy was clear enough: full territorial occupation of China would be prohibitively expensive. Military defeat of China was easy, but not so its pacification. Still more was this true of Japan. In order to warrant their trade interests and avoid the cost of direct occupation, the colonial powers designed the policy of semi-colonization whereby the task of maintaining law and order was incumbent on the ruling dynasties. In China, for instance, the colonial powers decided to "refrain . . . from actions that would undermine the Manchu dynasty's position."¹⁷⁰

A further manifestation of how careful colonialism was to shun costly wars and occupations is decolonization. To the sudden willingness of colonial powers to grant independence to colonies formerly guarded with jeal-

ousy, no other reason should be sought than the clear perception that delay or refusal would entail violent uprisings. Owing to changes in the international political scene, these uprisings would make continuous occupation very costly, but would also in due time render "defeat inevitable,"¹⁷¹ as nationalist movements would enjoy the support of various countries and of Western anti-colonialist forces. An eloquent case in point remains French misfortunes in Algeria and Vietnam.

In the light of this imperative of colonial policy to stay cheap, the survival of Ethiopia during the scramble should no longer be a mystery. As the most experienced of all the colonial powers, Great Britain and France were well placed to estimate the real cost of the defeat and occupation of Ethiopia. Convinced that the cost of annexation would far exceed its return, they refrained from putting into action their usual design. They simply kept in mind a contingency plan in case internal disturbances in Ethiopia would decrease the expenses of annexation. In the meantime, they preferred to further their interests through trade agreements and diplomatic means. In other words, the unique case of Ethiopia was actually foreshadowing the general situation of African countries in the 1950s. Only inexperienced or hard pressed colonial contenders such as Egypt or Italy would venture into the Ethiopian trap.

At this stage, it is necessary to strengthen our theory by conspicuous facts. The Italian debacle at Adwa would be sufficient were it not debilitated by the argument of the weak colonizer. So let us imagine Italy becoming very much stronger to the point of outdistancing Ethiopia by a vast chasm. Let us also suppose that Italy preserves the same aggressive colonial policy, but matured by lessons learned from past mistakes. This supposition lands us nowhere else but on the scene of the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia. That Italy, having lost its democratic institutions, was under a fascist regime can already be seen as an aftermath of the Adwa defeat. The promise "to avenge Adowa"¹⁷² had been a contributing factor to the rise of fascism in Italy so that to the important human and material losses in the Adwa disaster, we must append the spiritual decline manifested by the attraction of fascism on Italy.

No need to enter into the circumstances and diplomatic trickeries before and at the time of the invasion. Let us simply note that Mussolini, though militarily ready more than ever before, was still hesitant for fear of disaster. Because he "knew that the military conquest of Ethiopia would be costly,"¹⁷³ his only hope lay in the excess of his military superiority over

the Ethiopians. This factor "transformed a colonial campaign into a war of invasion with use of massive artillery fire, the employment of the air force, and gas."¹⁷⁴ Defeat and occupation of Ethiopia required that Italian troops "reached about 500,000," a number "enormous by colonial standards. . . ."¹⁷⁵ If we look at the cost, we have the following estimate: "from 1936 to 1940 . . . the price of the Italian conquest of Ethiopia was equivalent to US 7. 142.857.142 . . . almost 15000 Italians died and over 200,000 were crippled and wounded."¹⁷⁶ On the Ethiopian side, the human loss is estimated "at 275,000 dead."¹⁷⁷

The material expenses, the human losses, and the number of mobilized soldiers evince the extent to which the five years of Italian occupation failed to achieve pacification. Continuous guerrilla warfare waged by the patriots, whose number reached 200,000 to 300,000,¹⁷⁸ had changed the occupation into a garrisoned presence. Evidently, the war expenses and the tremendous Italian investment in the construction of modern roads, bridges, and administrative towns were in no way compensated by economic returns of any kind.

In view of the cost and scale of the invasion, one wonders whether the war and the occupation can even be termed colonial. In this regard, Mussolini's speech announcing his victory is quite instructive: "During the thirty centuries of our history," he said, "Italy has known many solemn and memorable moments—this is unquestionably one of the most solemn, the most memorable."¹⁷⁹ Summing up the record of Ethiopian survival, an Italian writer added:

Our troops had triumphed in Ethiopia where even the Romans failed, where the Arab invasion could make no headway, where the fortunes of modern military Egypt foundered, where the British army had been forced to retreat in hot haste.¹⁸⁰

Why, then, should one speak of "the strongest colonial expeditionary force that Africa had ever known?"¹⁸¹ Seeing the cost and scale of the invasion, the most reasonable approach is not to call it colonial. A colonial war that cost so much could hardly be described as the most memorable event of the history of an European nation, still less be paralleled to the most glorious moments of resistance known to world history.

Various reasons would support such a conceptual change. There is the timing, which led many scholars to characterize the Italian adventure as anachronistic. But the "anachronism" ceases to exist if we see the event as

a turning point in world history, to wit the beginning of the Second World War. Indeed, according to some scholars,

the second world war may be seen as having begun in Africa long before it broke out in Europe—not with the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, but with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935.”¹⁸²

The same scholars note how very different the Italian war of 1935 was from a colonial war:

Far from being a cheap little war, like the one in which Britain conquered the vastly more populous emirates of northern Nigeria with less than 2,000 African troops, the Italians deployed more than 120,000 Italian soldiers at the beginning of the campaign and would use nearly half a million Africans and Italians before it was finished.¹⁸³

Assuredly, this difference in degree denotes a difference in kind. So much the more so if we add the ideological factor, for only a fascist regime could so readily commit so many human and material resources to achieve a vain military victory. The case is perfectly analogous to the European situation when, in the name of the purity and glory of a race, Nazi Germany undertook the conquest of the world. As happened in Europe, in order to defeat Ethiopia, Mussolini had recourse to gas and systematic extermination, all backed by the ideology of race superiority. Ethiopia was defeated by fascism, as were all the countries of Europe with the exception of Great Britain and Russia. Also like the European countries, Ethiopia regained its independence with the assistance of the British and Commonwealth troops—one distinguishing trait being that Ethiopia “more than anything else . . . owed its freedom to the internal resistance movement.”¹⁸⁴ Indeed, the extent of that resistance movement—and that alone—dissuaded the British once again at this juncture from realizing their old but always postponed project of occupying Ethiopia.

All in all, Ethiopia escaped unhurt from colonial partition. The fascist interlude demonstrated the need to lift the standard for colonial campaigns up to the European standard of war in order to subjugate Ethiopia. But there is more to the matter than this: the Italian defeat of Ethiopia may justly be said to encompass the profile of Ethiopian survival. Most stu-

dents of Ethiopia attribute the defeat to the enormous material superiority of the Italian army. This superiority was doubtless an important but by no means an exclusive factor. Internal factors inherent in Haile Selassie's regime were also a cause for defeat. Short of victory, the Ethiopian army could have either stopped the Italian advance or made its progress extremely difficult and slow. Neither Mussolini nor his generals believed in a quick victory. The unexpected collapse of the Ethiopian army begs serious examination.

Scholars put forward additional explanations, such as the lack of preparation on the Ethiopian side, strategic errors including disdain of guerrilla warfare, and inexperienced and unqualified military leadership. All these factors had some impact, but none greater than the lack of unity on the Ethiopian side. Owing to Haile Selassie's divisive policy, important regional leaders, such as *Ras Gugsa* of Tigre and *Ras Hailu* of Gojjam defected to the Italians; then, a great section of the northern regional nobility, aggrieved by the Shewan tribalism of Haile Selassie, was, if not openly reluctant, at least not enthusiastic about supporting Haile Selassie. In this context of disunity, Italian subversive propaganda proved more rewarding than it had in Menelik's time. As a result, Ethiopia was "deprived . . . of at least 200000 men who either did not take up arms or who, although enrolled and armed, remained inert."¹⁸⁵ Besides, all the errors denounced by scholars can be imputed to Haile Selassie's bad leadership.

Each time, then, that Ethiopia suffered defeat, it owed that defeat to disunity. As with Haile Selassie's defeat, the victory of the British over Tewodros was due to lack of unity. In turn, the circumstances of the victory of Adwa were totally different. Then unity prevailed: Italian attempts to win over some influential Ethiopian warlords failed lamentably. Even those who, like *Ras Sebbat* and *Ras Hagos Tafari*, had previously joined the Italians "defected to the emperor"¹⁸⁶ just before the war started. None of the regional lords and their followers had wished to miss the show, and the battle was fought with high spirit and dedication.

Given that victory or defeat was conditional on the degree of achieved unity, the key to the problem of Ethiopian survival lay undoubtedly in the pillars supporting the unity. But unity is an abstract concept until it is carved out according to its major axes of articulation. Moreover, since the values shared in common united the Ethiopians, we must expound the manner in which these values worked towards the effective preservation of Ethiopia.

The insufficiency of Rubenson's approach shows the extent to which such a study is needed. Rubenson emphasized the underestimation of the colonial powers; he also related this underestimation to the neglect of the "determination and ability" of Ethiopia's "struggle for survival."¹⁸⁷ Yet he did not tell us about the form and content of this will to survive, nor about its methods and the reasons for its success. Why did the Ethiopians possess this determination to survive? And what made them able to effectively survive? Unless these questions are answered, the inquiry cannot go beyond the empirical level of thinking: it will establish the fact without explaining it.

Such an explanatory approach, however, was undertaken by Donald Levine. The competition between the colonial powers, their miscalculations, the rise of able and determined leaders at crucial moments, have no doubt contributed to the preservation of Ethiopian independence. Still, argues Levine, "internal characteristics of Ethiopia not commonly recognized were essential conditions for the viability of the Ethiopian state and the success of its rulers."¹⁸⁸ Levine has gone a long way towards depicting the internal characteristics. But his analyses were not always consistent, nor clear-cut enough to allow us to see the power of survival emerging from the society and its values. In particular, he was not successful in grasping the basic value, the force driving the Ethiopians. The following chapters aim at providing corrections and complementary analyses.

Chapter Two

MYTH AND POWER

Any inquiry into the survival of Ethiopia is confronted with the question of power. Ethiopia survived for so long (it may be conjectured) thanks to a system of power suited to the purpose of survival. The system rested on three overlapping bases: the imperial throne, the Church, and the nobility. The present chapter studies their manifold interrelations with a view to showing how they worked towards preservation. The study refers exclusively to the history of imperial Ethiopia; post-imperial Ethiopia, which began with the overthrow of Haile Selassie in 1974, is not included in this chapter, partly because post-imperial Ethiopia functions on a different plane, partly because its capacity for survival is the least of the characteristics it shares with imperial Ethiopia.

STATE AND CHURCH

Scholars have more often than not passed contradictory judgments on the Ethiopian Church. In particular, the exact meaning of the unity of church and state has never been elucidated in a satisfactory manner. Yet the understanding of the place of ideology and of its precise nature depends on the way the connection between church and state is conceptualized.

A too common accusation against the Ethiopian Church focuses on its lack of missionary zeal, or on the ignorance and worldliness of its priesthood. Extreme conservatism, associated with a deep-seated interest in the traditional landholding system, is another frequent reproach. The great dependence of the church on the state is generally believed to be the prime cause of these defects.

Thus, the spread of Islam was not halted because "the Ethiopian church . . . did not rise to the great challenge presented it by the expansion, for missionary work has never been a conspicuous part of its vocation."¹ Observing how ignorant—even illiterate and superstitious the priesthood was—one could not but regret that it "should exercise so much power and influence,"² all the more so as the backwardness of Ethiopia can be attributed in large measure to the extreme conservatism of the priests, who "have always been bitterly opposed to progress and to innovations."³ Last but not least, inalienable church tenures granted by emperors and believed to amount to one-third of the cultivated land made the Church more a land owner than a religious propagator, and thereby a zealous defender of the traditional system of land ownership.

Convinced that the Church was oblivious to its religious duties because of its absolute reliance on the state, Markakis could find no other term to qualify the position of the church *vis-à-vis* the state than that of "appendage of the throne."⁴ Illustrative of the total subordination of the church to the state was the foreign origin of the head of the Ethiopian Church, the *Abuna*. Appointed by Alexandria, the *Abuna* was an Egyptian, totally alien to the language and local customs of the Ethiopian Church. Though highly revered, he "had little power, and in some cases was little more than the tool of the reigning king."⁵

The traditional link of the Ethiopian Church to Alexandria actually reinforced its dependence on the imperial throne. Since obtaining a new bishop always required impressive imperial gifts to the Egyptian Sultanate, it came more under the imperial privilege of foreign affairs than under a purely ecclesiastical jurisdiction. So obtained, the bishop could only be an instrument of emperors. The dependence became greater as the *Ichege*, who was the head of all monastic orders and really in charge of the Church, was himself "attached permanently to the imperial court, acting as the emperor's chief adviser and administrator for ecclesiastical affairs."⁶

Unsurprisingly, in this climate of total subordination, an independent missionary spirit could not develop. As a result, "the evangelization of the Ethiopian region followed very closely the expansion of the Christian state."⁷ The defense of imperial political dominance and monarchical absolutism took precedence over Christian teachings, the conversion of pagans, and the instilling of moral standards. For this political role, the Church was rewarded with large estates, which only accentuated its conservatism and dependence. The decline of the evangelical spirit inevitably entailed the

deterioration of belief. Hence the minimal fidelity of the priests to the principles of Christian life as well as their inability to advance their evangelical commitments and mystical drive.

All the same, these criticisms convey nothing peculiar about the Ethiopian Church. Churches in Europe have been accused of greater crimes, as witnessed by the various schisms which racked Western Christianity. Each of these schisms pretended to redress in one way or another the deterioration of Christian belief and its priesthood.

Still, according to some students of Ethiopia, the state was dependent on the Church rather than vice versa. Patrick Gilkes, for instance, states that "theocracy is perhaps the best word to use in describing the imperial system. Religion was a major pre-occupation of the Emperors and a main function for the throne was the support for the Church."⁸ Nor is the view of the Ethiopian state as an instrument of the Church mere hyperbole. No Emperor, however powerful, has succeeded in keeping his throne while being in conflict with the Ethiopian Church. Recall the abdication of Susenyos after his conversion to Catholicism. For the same reason Iyasu I was murdered in 1706, and Yostos deposed in 1716. More recently, Lij Iyasu lost the throne because of his alleged sympathy for Islam. Most scholars attribute the isolation of Tewodros and his defeat by the British to his conflict with the Church following his decision to confiscate some of its properties. The custom of inalienable imperial land grants to the Church further substantiates the view of the Ethiopian state as the instrument of the Ethiopian Church. So too does the decisive role of anointment: far from being a mere formality or a recognition of a right, it was believed to be the real instance of consecration, the moment the Emperor was invested with actual power. As only then did the Emperor acquire his status as the elect of God, intense negotiations aimed at safeguarding the interests of the Church⁹ preceded the consecration.

These antithetical views on the Ethiopian Church call for a more balanced approach. Donald Levine provided such an approach by defending the "reality of functional specialization in Christian Ethiopia"¹⁰ between the secular and the religious. He had first denounced the alleged lack of missionary spirit as an abusive statement. The Ethiopian Church has produced "a number of remarkable Amhara monks who went as missionaries to the pagan lands armed with little more than a cross,"¹¹ the most famous of them being Tekle Haymanot. Anyway, even if paganism has survived and Islam was not contained, the success of the Ethiopian Church is none-

theless impressive in comparison with other Churches which were overwhelmed by Islam to the point of complete extinction. The very survival of the Ethiopian Church throws serious doubts on the accusation of lack of commitment. To survive for so long under condition of sustained struggle against not only Islam, but also against Catholicism and Protestantism, despite the theological "superiority" and European prestige of the latter, is indeed a mark of prowess. The level of its asceticism was also remarkable considering the records and rules of the Ethiopian monastic life. To quote one author, the monastic movement comprised

monks living as celibates in the seclusion of their monasteries, which are usually located far from the corrupting influences of secular life. Sex is so completely eliminated from the life of the monastery that not only are women excluded, but all female animals as well. Monks, because of their reputation for great spirituality, are generally held in higher regard than priests, whose failings are known to everyone.¹²

Few Churches in the world can pride themselves on having such a high degree of fidelity and abnegation.

Different organizational principles ruled over the Church and the state. While the state tended towards vertical centralization allowing little differentiation, no such centralization existed in the Church, so that it leaned towards "a high degree of local autonomy and internal differentiation."¹³ The abbot of a regional monastery remained the main authority in religious matters. Local autonomy supported functional differentiation by ascribing to the religious and the political "separate sources of legitimacy, distinct bases of power and influence, contrasting patterns of internal organization, and specialized societal functions."¹⁴ This situation only encouraged the proliferation of religious sects and controversies.

Autonomy did not exclude close interactions between the Church and the state; simply, these relations could not be couched in terms of the one being the instrument of the other. As the authority of the Church mainly emanated from the autonomy and strict rules of monasticism, its power was essentially spiritual. To this spiritual influence, the secular power had to give due consideration. Inversely, the importance of monasticism implied that the Church was not expected to play a predominant political role. The secluded life of monasticism was a safeguard against constant

interferences in political matters, which were logically left to the emperor and the nobility.

What is one to conclude from this debate? The two extreme conceptions presenting the union of Church and state in terms of the one being the tool of the other are clearly out of touch with reality. Both undergird their arguments with facts seemingly corroborating their views while conspicuously ignoring recalcitrant facts. Had it not ended up in another form of partiality by almost disposing of the important problem of the unity of the Church and state, Levine's view would have been more balanced. Talks about autonomy must not blind us to the imperative of unity. The solution is not so much to deny or mitigate the unity as to unravel the way its structure allowed at once autonomy and mutual incorporation. A discussion of the Byzantine Church here would be most helpful.

The nature of the merger between the political and the religious had been a constant concern of the Byzantine Church. Repeated state encroachments on the prerogatives of the Church aroused the resistance of religious communities. A deal was struck which, while limiting the imperial authority in religious matters, promoted what has come to be known as the symphonic ideal.¹⁵ As the religious and the political were both believed to come from God, they were summoned to achieve unity in harmony. The one could neither contradict nor subserve the other. Unlike the Catholic Church, which gave rise to an absolute monarchy whereby kings incarnated spiritual as well as temporal powers, the Orthodox Church veered towards the symphonic conception. Both powers were supposed to lead humanity to God, but as different and complementary functions of the same organism.¹⁶ The harmony being essential, none was supposed to absorb or supplant the other; the ideal lay in the harmony of their relationships.

To criticize the union of the political and the religious is to ask the Ethiopian Church to challenge a fundamental belief inscribed in its doctrine of unity or *tewahdo*. Only through unity, through the realization of theocracy, can divine guidance descend upon the state. In remaining indifferent or autonomous towards each other, or in installing a relation of subordination, the state and the Church would be discrediting the injunction of unity. This conception ties the Church to the state, even as it summons the state to rule according to Christian principles and to protect and enhance the Church. In no way could the state have a secular goal of its own. As we shall see, from the symphonic conception of unity of the reli-

gious and the political has arisen the religious nationalism of Ethiopia, which is an important clue to understanding the survival of Ethiopia.

The injunction of harmonious unity could not but resist the advent of absolute imperial power, since the imperial power is bound to come to terms with the Church. One can hardly imagine emperors in Ethiopia taking on the power to decide on religious affairs, for instance, to effecting changes in doctrinal matters as did the absolute monarchs of Europe. Still less could they profess religious beliefs not shared by the Church and remain emperors. Remember the episode of Susenyos: the vigor with which the Church reacted to his Catholic leanings sprang from the heart of the doctrine, from the unitary conception. The power of the Church stemmed less from its special political prerogatives than from the injunction of the faith itself, which stood for the harmonious fusion of the political and the religious. The fusion was difficult to realize; nonetheless, it served as a binding principle.

One of the merits of this approach is to help us clarify some of the characteristics of the Ethiopian Church. The wealth of the Ethiopian Church, formerly denounced vehemently, actually invites a more indulgent attitude. Whether as much as one-third of the cultivated land belonged to the Church or not, the Church undoubtedly had substantial holdings. Why did the various emperors feel obliged to grant so much land to the Church? The quest for support must have been an important reason, but by no means the only reason. Strange would be the strategy of obtaining support from the Church through the grant of inalienable lands. Such a grant would render the Church more independent and its support expensive. A policy of donations yielding emancipation rather than dependence hardly agrees with known methods of ruling, unless we assume that such was its purpose.

The amount and the inalienable status of the wealth controlled by the Church were essentially ways of putting into practice the principle of fusion. It would have been incongruous to speak of fusion were the Church materially dependent on the good will of emperors. Only grants of inalienable land could protect the Church from becoming subordinate to the state. The quantity and nature of ecclesiastical holdings were therefore a practical application of the principle of fusion. Inversely, the imperial power too had its inalienable rights *vis-à-vis* the Church. The latter was not so much a "king-maker" as a "king confirmer," since it "consecrated him whose struggles enabled him to seize the throne."¹⁷ In other words, the

Church had no imperial candidate of its own; nor was it expected to meddle in political affairs. It had to consecrate not its favorite, but the one who emerged victorious from the power struggle.

In such a case, the Church recognized the emergence of a complementary and distinct power. The autonomy of the imperial power was the sign of its emanation from God: the winner was the true elect of God according to criteria of political and military leadership. Because imperial criteria are different from ecclesiastical criteria, the source of imperial power was distinct from the Church, while being convergent by virtue of God's unity. The scene was thus set for the symphonic fusion of complementary powers, both emanating from God but referring to separate criteria that excluded the subordination of the one to the other. The function of the imperial land grants was not to ensure the dependence of the Church; it was the fulfillment of the responsibility of the throne to protect and enhance Christianity.

A deeper insight is gained if the principle of fusion is referred to the particular condition of Ethiopia. For the fusion of the political and the religious to generate a form of religious nationalism such as existed in Ethiopia, the transcendence of ethnic divisions and loyalties was an imperative requirement. Both the Church and the imperial power had to rise above ethnic cleavages to acquire national stature. One way of doing this was to secure the economic independence of the Church from the regional nobility and regional factions by the grant of inalienable lands. Fortified by such economic rights, the Church was free to consecrate the victorious emperor without being torn by ethnic loyalties whose interference would imperil the very notion of the elect of God. Only the national level, perceived as being beyond human interference by its enfranchisement from ethnic and individual preferences, could become the field of divine choice. As rightly noted by one scholar, the wealth of the Church denoted

an alliance between the Church, which obtained a degree of independence and wealth comparable to that of the Church in feudal Europe, and the Emperor, who gained the throne and effectively saw to it that the Church could not become a tool of factions within Ethiopia.¹⁸

The emperor thus became the main protector of the Church and the Church, in turn, the consecrator of the legitimate emperor by virtue of its indepen-

dence. Through this mutual mechanism of acquiring autonomy, both were raised to the level of national institutions.

We can now examine the question of the foreign origin of the head of the Ethiopian Church. The interpretation of this origin as signifying the great dependence of the Church on the monarchy can be easily inverted. The consecration of the *Abuna* by Alexandria would rather consolidate the autonomy of the Church if only because he was no direct or indirect imperial nominee. Being a foreigner may impede the exercise of his power in internal matters, even as it may facilitate his role in representing the national interest and stature of the Church. As an alien, he does not partake in ethnic intrigues and factional political manoeuvres. Those scholars who explain the tradition of having an Egyptian as *Abuna* by the loyalty of the Ethiopian Church to Alexandria do not tell us all the story. In his book, *Evangelical Pioneers in Ethiopia*, Gustav Arén reports that Samuel Gobat, a member of the Church of England who came to Ethiopia after the mid-nineteenth century, showed such a conciliatory attitude towards the Ethiopian Church that "people began to ask if he was not the right man to become the new *abun*. Even *Ichegé* Filipos favoured the idea."¹⁹ What mattered, then, was less the Egyptian origin of the archbishop than his capacity to become a national figure, to rise above factions. In sum, the dependence of the Church on Alexandria helped to shape an independent Church and "to avoid internal rivalry in the nomination to the leadership of the Church."²⁰

This external leadership was all the more important the more numerous controversies with ethnic or regional bases were dividing the Church. In view of the Archbishop's sole "power to crown kings" and given the fact that "no priest can be ordained without him,"²¹ the preservation of the national stature of the Church was essential to the whole system. The suspension of the Alexandrian link has been praised as an important achievement of Haile Selassie. It would have been so if the autonomous Church thus established did not come at the same time "more under imperial control."²² Once the link was cut, the principle of fusion was smashed in favor of subordination. Naturally, the reduction of its national character infested the Church with ethnic cleavages. This is not to imply that the dependence on Alexandria should have been maintained, but rather its suspension should have been accompanied by reforms designed to reinforce the independence of the Church. As the autocratic rule of Haile Selassie could not contemplate such measures, the way was open for all

sorts of abusive practices of the kind which saw the successors of Haile Selassie directly meddling in the intrigues of nomination so as to have their own candidate elected as head of the Church.

The political importance of the Church, rightly underlined by many scholars, was derived not so much from direct interference into political affairs as from the maintenance of its national posture. During the Era of the Princes, Greenfield notes, "the Empire of Ethiopia disintegrated into a series of almost independent feudatories whose main link was not the monarchy but the Christian Church."²³ The Church could not have fulfilled the role of unifier if, following the political system, it had pandered to ethnic loyalties. Its institutions and traditions safeguarded it against such a negative evolution by ensuring its independence from the regional nobility. It is worth noting that the national character of the Church was reinforced by a linguistic factor. While the political system was fragmented by linguistic barriers, the Church opted for the common liturgical language of Geez, which affirmed its particularity and unity.

It should come as no surprise, then, if the three outstanding emperors who knuckled down to the job of bringing to an end the Era of the Princes essentially relied on the unifying factor of the Church and on the revival of Solomonic myth. Tewodros gathered power under the banner of the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty, understood as the founding discourse of the unity of the Church and state, even if later on bitter quarrels with the Church antagonized his initial project. Yohannes followed this course of thinking with greater consistency. Asked why he would not allow European missionaries to work in Ethiopia, he allegedly replied:

if I allow them to catechize and to rebuild their churches and to exercise their religion in public, I shall find myself in conflict with the Abuna. I shall be excommunicated as Menelik was and my Rases and my people will rise up against me.²⁴

However, Menelik was equally imbued with a mystical calling able to seduce the Church: "he would be the second great Menelik, as had been prophesied at his birth; he would restore the grandeur and power of Christian Ethiopia."²⁵

This broader understanding of the unity of Church and state in Ethiopia allows us to proceed to a concrete study of its structure. The fusion was not a mere injunction; it was also structured by a myth enshrined in

the *Kibre Negest* (*The Glory of Kings*), a document essential for understanding how in Ethiopia myth became power.

THE *KIBRE NEGEST*

How rightly the *Kibre Negest* can be considered as the founding myth of the merger of Church and state, these words of Edward Ullendorff give a good idea:

The *Kibre Negest* is not merely a literary work, but—as the Old Testament to the Hebrews or the Koran to the Arabs—it is the repository of Ethiopian national and religious feelings, perhaps the truest and most genuine expression of Abyssinian Christianity.²⁶

In order to have a fair understanding of the role it was bound to play, let us give a very brief summary of the content of the myth.

The myth is essentially the source of what is known as the Solomonic dynasty. An Ethiopian queen, Sheba or Makeda, paid a visit to King Solomon of Israel. She was attracted by his celebrated wisdom while he was impressed by her beauty. In order to seduce her, King Solomon wove a stratagem: gambling on her promise not to take anything belonging to him under pain of accepting his wishes, he made her eat a spicy supper, as a result of which she became thirsty during the night and drank the water he had purposely placed near her bed. Her pledge thus infringed, she had no other choice than to sleep with him. The result, however, was a happy one: a son was born who would become the king of Ethiopia under the name of Menelik I. All subsequent Ethiopian emperors, with the exception of the Zagwe kings, are believed to descend from Menelik I and thus from King Solomon. Hence the notion of the Solomonic dynasty, whose continuity is such that the last emperor of Ethiopia, the late Haile Selassie I, still claimed to continue the Solomonic line.

The most important part of the myth resides in the suggestion that Menelik I was heir to King Solomon not only naturally but in the eyes of God as well. This was dramatically expressed by King Solomon's dream after he slept with the queen:

And after he slept there appeared unto King Solomon (in a dream) a brilliant sun, and it came down from heaven and shed exceed-

ingly great splendour over Israel. And when it had tarried there for a time it suddenly withdrew itself, and it flew away to the country of Ethiopia, and it shone there with exceedingly great brightness for ever, for it willed to dwell there.²⁷

The legend relates in no uncertain terms how God's favor swung from Israel to Ethiopia. The sun which withdrew from Israel in order to shine again and for ever over Ethiopia symbolizes Israel's disfavor and Ethiopia's promotion to the rank of the new elect of God. The reason for this displacement is Christianity: both being inheritors of Judaism, the acceptance of Christianity by the Ethiopians will make them God's chosen people "replacing the sinful Israelites,"²⁸ who will refuse Christianity.

Thus, a religious instance was coupled with a secular component: Christianity was tied up with a given territory, people, and emperorship. The Ethiopian emperors, descendants of King Solomon and Queen Sheba, whose encounter was none other than a divine design to hand on the torch of election from Israel to Ethiopian monarchs, incarnated the change of preference. Henceforth all the tasks assigned previously to Israel passed on to Ethiopia. The guardianship of Christianity, entrusted to a people headed by monarchs perceived as instruments of God, sealed the unity of Church and state.

The *Kibre Negest* is therefore a "national epic" in that "it defines the secular and religious foundation of Ethiopian nationhood."²⁹ Specifically, it depicted Ethiopian nationhood in terms of the oneness and common destiny of Church and state, the state acting as the guardian of the faith and the Church consecrating the election of the people and its emperor. In addition to being an official religion, Christianity had become the *raison d'être* of a people and of its social and political system. It was everything—at once religion, culture, way of life, and polity.

Before going further into the analysis of the myth, a discussion on the Ethiopian authorship of the myth is in order. On the strength of an assumption according to which the *Kibre Negest* was translated from an early Arabic version, the originality of the Ethiopian source is contested in some circles. Nevertheless, the allegation has never been substantiated by convincing historical evidence of such nature as to damage the Ethiopian claim to authorship. Though the Ethiopians cannot prove their own allegation, they have the superior merit of having lived through the epic with their besieged Christianity, while the presumed creators of the myth left Christianity for Islam. More than a mere mental creation, the *Kibre Negest* was

for the Ethiopians a genuine experience and the canon through which they have construed their history, social organization, and national destiny. Their isolation and resistance to Islam, the preservation of the faith in its pristine forms are for the Ethiopians the clear indication that the *Kibre Negest* belongs to them. Besides being its mental creator, they consider themselves the bearer of its injunction and existential unfolding.

Moreover, since we are dealing with a myth, what matters is not so much the question of authorship as the intensity of the belief. Just as the question of whether a myth is true or false is vain, so is its attribution to a specific person or nation. A mythical discourse is, to use Nietzsche's expression, beyond truth and error, good and evil. As a founding discourse, it sets the canons in reference to which truth and error, good and evil are defined.³⁰ Only those nations able to interpret their own life and the world in reference to their founding myth have turned out to be free and achieving. The great superiority of the West lies less in its technological power than in its sovereign ability to decode and value phenomena according to founding myths. This capacity, otherwise known as Eurocentrism, is the power to put the world into a perspective to which, naturally, the West holds the key. As "foreground valuations" and "provisional perspectives,"³¹ mythical ideas trigger off the power of interpretation, classifying the phenomena of the world according to the categories of truth and error, good and evil. Western technology is itself derivative of a specific way of putting the world into perspective.

Sad to say, those countries now called underdeveloped attest their inability to modernize by the loss of their founding myth. As a result, they have become real satellites of those countries that still retain their interpretative power after their own successful modernization. It follows, then, that all attempts to study the culture, history, social organization of a people without reference to that people's founding legend only increases its satellization through a borrowed perspective. The study deals not with the actual history and culture of the people, but with the history and culture of the people as interpreted by alien canons. Precaution against such kind of deformation sufficiently justifies the insistence with which I pursue the depiction of the founding myth of Ethiopia.

The *Kibre Negest* is said to have been written around 1320 by Tigrean monks under the patronage of a Tigrean lord named Yaibike Igzi. However, Levine and others are of the opinion that it had been "current at least in oral tradition long before"³² the fourteenth century. In order to explain

this late written composition, Levine goes into a complicated psychological analysis. As the date of the composition coincides with the rise of the Amhara dynasty at the expense of the Tigrean house, the loss of political authority on the part of the Tigreans was, the explanation says, compensated for by its transmutation into moral authority. The composition was a way of reminding the Amhara dynasty of its Aksumite heritage and thus of reinstating "the centrality of Aksumite traditions concerning Makeda and Solomon as a source of cultural legitimation for the monarchy."³³ The Tigrean legacy was thus preserved and recognized by the new ruling house.

As to the proper explication of the content of the *Kibre Negest*, Levine devised a Freudian type of elucidation, still more intricate. According to him, the lighter skin of the people who brought Judaism and Christianity to Ethiopia in combination with the curse affixed to the descendants of Ham may have induced a complex of inferiority that the Ethiopians wanted to shake off by "portraying their elite as having been descended from the elite of Judah."³⁴ The identity crisis was resolved by the appendage of a Semitic root to the Ethiopian elite and by the "reversal of roles," elevating the Ethiopians to the rank of "the chosen ones, while henceforth the Jews are to be excluded."³⁵

Levine's assumptions are not necessarily imaginary; what he says about the reversal of roles is definitely admissible. Still, the generation of the myth from the inferiority complex caused by the lighter skin of the Jews looks, to say the least, far-fetched. In the first place, the real existence of the inferiority complex must be confirmed. On the one hand, the association of dark skin with inferiority is a recent perception, induced by Eurocentrism; on the other, the Ethiopian mentality is renowned for its immunity against racist obsessions. Moreover, the biblical curse on the descendants of Ham has not prevented Black Africans from serenely espousing Christianity, any more than the curse on Adam has hindered the Jews from being content with their own identity even though they rejected Christianity.

The necessity of Levine's type of elucidation vanishes as soon as the role of the myth is defined in the context of Ethiopian Christianity. The isolation of the religious belief, its connection with the Byzantine doctrine, and the cultural legacy of Aksum are the ingredients of the myth-making. The myth reflected a real situation by investing it with meaning, thus providing the Ethiopians with the much needed interpretative power over the world.

In effect, the way the *Kibre Negest* crowns the emperor as the elect of God dovetails with the Orthodox requirement of amalgamation of the political with the religious. Because on the Ethiopian throne no power other than the choice of God sat, the secular body was impregnated with a spiritual inspiration. Accordingly, the principle of heredity is not applicable to the Ethiopian emperorship. In being the outcome of God's election, emperorship was a divine concern and responsibility. As no one can pretend to know the choice of God before He himself reveals it by definite signs, the defense of the principle of hereditary succession to the throne, be it primogeniture or otherwise, is to limit the sovereign power of God by a human institution and probably to go against His will. Hence the decisive role of anointment conceived as the effective moment of legitimate empowerment and the Church's role as authenticator of God's choice. In the system of primogeniture, imperial power is transmitted from the father to his eldest son, and the supreme authority to recognize an heir belongs to the father. Not so with the principle of divine election: royal inheritance is not inscribed once and for all in the lineage. Succession is, so to speak, hand picked by the express and intermittent intervention of God.

On the basis of its autonomy, the Church authenticates God's selection. In this way, the purpose of the unity of Church and state appears clearly. In authenticating God's choice, the Church is at once distinct from and wedded to the state. It is worth noting that this conception is inherent in Orthodox Christianity in general. Wherever it became established, the Orthodox Church has come out in favor of the principle of divine election against the hereditary precept, even if attempts were always made to institute the latter.³⁶

Let us insist on the autonomy of the Church. For the Church to confirm divine choice, it must be endowed with an autonomous status. Dependence on secular power or participation in the internal struggle for power would *de facto* corrupt its authentication. Worse, if ethnic bias or regional allegiance causes the Church to be partial towards a given claimant, the whole idea of confirming God's choice is irremediably spoiled and its unity endangered. Because scholars generally miss the importance of the impartiality of the Church, they easily get tangled in contradictory remarks. To quote a case, Perham affirms on the one hand that the *Abuna* was "deeply subordinate to the Emperor"³⁷ while, on the other, she admits that the association of the emperor with the Church "provided the unifying elements which continually countered the centrifugal forces of

geography, tribalism and aristocracy."³⁸ Yet, more than its alleged subordination, the national character of the Church—i.e., its autonomy and emancipation from centrifugal forces—would better explain its centripetal role.

Besides, the true meaning of the Solomonic dynasty resides in the necessity of transcending ethnic fidelities. At first look, the notion of a Solomonic dynasty seems to establish rather than undermine the hereditary principle. Actually, the Judaic element forestalls this objection. As noted by Levine, the entire Ethiopian elite could claim the Solomonic affiliation. So wide and inclusive a notion excluded practically no one. Tewodros was from Gonder, Yohannes from Tigre, Menelik from Shoa, yet all claimed to belong to the Solomonic line. Undoubtedly, the notion carries an ideological connotation rather than one of lineage.

To belong to the Solomonic dynasty meant to be above ethnic or regional loyalties or, which is the same thing, to share what was common to all the ruling elites of Ethiopia over and above their ethnic difference. The emperor is acceptable to the ethnically diverse people of Ethiopia by the supervenient Solomonic reference which elevates him above ethnic and regional ties. The Solomonic dynasty is more a nationalistic notion than a hereditary or ethnic principle. Beyond a cultural inheritance, the reference to Judaism can hardly be corroborated by any meaningful records of lineage. The cultural realm itself will not go further than the injunction to transcend ethnic particularism. The Ethiopian emperor cannot be reduced to Tigre, Shewa, or Wollo origin, for in addition to being any one of these, he is also Solomonic. Only by virtue of this Solomonic endorsement does he rule and is he confirmed by the Church.

The need to explain the Judaic element by the identity crisis is thus set aside. Instead, it would appear to be connected with the desire to emancipate the Ethiopian emperors from ethnic ties and regional limitations. The secret of the Solomonic myth was to ensure the fusion of the Church and state only at the national level. As to the exclusion of ethnicity, Solomonic reference alone gave power, and the myth only enabled the Church to consecrate a national figure. Consequently, the Church was protected from being dragged into ethnic politics and conflicts. Likewise, the imperial power could quietly pass from Tigre to Amhara claimants and vice versa. Since Solomonic meant cultural inheritance, the continuity of the Ethiopian state was preserved by clearing the imperial power of the ethnic drawback.

I see no other explanation for the coincidence of Amhara "usurpation" with the appearance of a written composition of the *Kibre Negest* than this need to conserve the flow of the Ethiopian state. Thanks to the notion of the Solomonic dynasty, everything appeared as though no change of dynasty had occurred. As was the case at the height of the Aksumite kingdom, the Tigreans and Amhara are still ruled by the same house. Better still, the inclusion of the Zagwe interlude transfigured the Amhara "usurpation" into a restoration of the legitimate dynasty. In achieving this amazing metamorphosis, the myth laid the foundation of a permanent and flexible political consensus.

Futhermore, insofar as the dynasty was referred to a remote origin and excluded no one, competition was open to all. This squared with the logical requirement of the idea of divine election. In banning primogeniture or other forms of established succession, the principle of Solomonic dynasty turned the throne into an object of free and open competition, a simple acknowledgment that God's choice, being mysterious, could fall on anybody. Ethnic limitation was transcended as much as individual vocation was stimulated.

The throne thus posited as an object of competition, the Church could declare the winner the elect of God, member of the Solomonic house. The separation of the process of rising to power from the process of consecration as emperor ensured genuine authentication. It also realized the merging, the symphonic accord, for in consecrating the one who has risen to power by himself, the Church appeared to acknowledge an objective outcome. This is how Perham portrays the competition:

The power of the monarchy may be visualized as a magnificent and lofty throne which was always standing ready for the dynast who had the military power and ability to climb up into it. The religious character of the throne insured that it would never be pulled down by so religious a people as the Ethiopians, and whenever a ruler was able, as many were, to mount all the steps that lead to the high seat of power he would find no theoretical limits to its exercise.³⁹

Significantly, Haile Selassie's constitution of 1931 was the first attempt to establish a hereditary monarchy in Ethiopia. In the name of modernization and for the purpose of peaceful succession, the constitution stipulated that "the Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of

His Majesty Haile Selassie 1st" and that "the Throne and the crown of the Empire shall be transmitted to the descendants of the Emperor pursuant to the law of the Imperial House."⁴⁰ Characteristically, the clause aroused vigorous protest on the part of the nobility, which discerned in it a dangerous deviation from the Solomonic tradition. The protest was led by Ras Hailu of Gojjam, who

refused to sign the new Constitution on the grounds that, contrary to Solomonic tradition, the successor to the Throne could only be chosen from the direct descendants of Haile Selassie. This was a clause to which even the loyal Ras Kassa had objected. The great nobles were prepared to accept the son of Ras Makonnen as Emperor but saw no reason why their own sons should not benefit from an equal opportunity. . . .⁴¹

Insofar as the notion of divine election served a national purpose, the Byzantine legacy fitted well the Ethiopian context. Add to this the fact of isolation, and the contents of the *Kibre Negest* entirely assume an indigenous target. The isolation of Ethiopia, coupled with the fact that all those surrounding countries which used to profess Judaism and Christianity were swept away by the Islamic wave, could not but strengthen the sense of Ethiopia's uniqueness. Ethiopia's faithfulness to Christianity in the face of the desertion of all its neighbors signified nothing less than a special assignment. Thus, everything conspired to make the Ethiopians believe in their status as the new chosen people. The shift of roles is explained by the very situation of Ethiopia: it was a way of interpreting isolation and of assuming a destiny. Ethiopia had to keep on being the sanctuary of Christianity, and so survive at all costs in order to be worthy of God's choice.

The *Kibre Negest*, then, provides the canon of Ethiopian history and the driving force of its historicity. It sets the task in the light of which the history of Ethiopia appears as its unfolding. Just as Marx posited the historicity of the working class by the goal of a classless society, or Hegel that of nations by conceiving them as moments in the realization of Spirit, so too had the *Kibre Negest* established the historicity of the Ethiopian people through the guardianship of Christianity. Menelik's view of Ethiopia as "a Christian island surrounded by a sea of pagans"⁴² describes well the Ethiopian mission.

Moreover, the reversal of roles mentioned in the *Kibre Negest* is not entirely devoid of indigenous roots. Steven Kaplan wonders whether the

Ethiopian claim to Solomonic legitimacy and divine election can be accepted "as an historical explanation."⁴³ He understands that the early presence of the Ethiopian Jews, known as the Falasha, singularly complicates his question. Jewish immigration and strong cultural influence being undeniable, rather than asking what is properly Jewish or Christian, or "thinking in terms of a sharp dichotomy," he suggests that "we must instead consider a continuum."⁴⁴ If we must think in terms of continuity, a native justification for the *Kibre Negest* can no longer be excluded, any more than the Ethiopian claim to be heir to Judaism can be taxed with being totally imaginary.

The way the *Kibre Negest* forged the unity of the state and Church turned, we said, the imperial throne into an object of competition. This could only add fuel to a political system already too inclined to power struggle. At any rate, the unity was far from ensuring an orderly process of succession. Scholars have insisted on the problems of imperial succession. According to Tadesse Tamrat, "the internal struggle for royal succession among descendants" was a permanent character of the political life and a source of persistent "political unrest."⁴⁵ Another scholar speaks of the "inherent weakness of the Ethiopian monarchy" which, despite its antiquity, has never succeeded in developing "effective rules of succession to the throne"⁴⁶ able to reduce the number of contenders. As a result, "very rarely in the country's long history has there been a peaceful accession of the heir apparent to the imperial dignity."⁴⁷ The problem was so endemic that monarchs found no other solution than to imprison contenders in "the Royal Prison of Mount Gishan."⁴⁸

These problems of succession were little consistent with the seeming nature of the monarchy. What could be more contradictory than this inability of an old and venerable dynastic line to initiate rules of succession? If, in lieu of assuring orderly succession, the dynastic rule incited ambitious contenders, what then was its purpose? A dynastic rule which multiplies contenders instead of limiting them cannot be said to protect the continuity of power. For instance, Yohannes of Tigre agreed to recognize Menelik, then a Shewan king, as heir to the imperial throne. We should be wary of all interpretation of his gesture as a great sign of abnegation. In the context of Ethiopia, it meant little, as Yohannes was aware that "all too often in the past legitimate heirs to the throne had been deposed by rival claimants."⁴⁹ Menelik knew equally that his success in acceding to the

throne would depend more on his own merits than on Yohannes's designation, however genuine it may have been.

This explains why some Ethiopian monarchs were seduced by Catholicism and Jesuit arguments. At first look, the *Kibre Negest*, hailing as it did the emperor as the elect of God, seemed appropriate for an absolute monarch. The reality, however, was quite different: even though the emperor had secured his throne against numerous contenders, he could not hand it over to his heir designate. In this respect Catholicism was much more convenient. Monarch by divine right, the Catholic emperor is not subject to the exigency of election whose intermittence perturbs the possibility of orderly succession. The right being inscribed once and for all in his blood, it naturally passes on to his offspring, the eldest son having priority over the rest.

In view of this advantage, the idea that "Catholicism was the religion of kings"⁵⁰ must have lingered in the mind of some Ethiopian emperors. It has certainly done so in the mind of Susenyos, who saw Catholicism as an ideology suited to absolute monarchy. The general turmoil aroused by his conversion to Catholicism illustrates the cultural gap separating the notion of emperorship according to the *Kibre Negest* from the Catholic interpretation. The fusion of Church and state would have been seriously jeopardized, were the Catholic type of divine right accepted. There would also have been a significant disturbance of the national ideology, as the notion of divine right would have infected the throne with an ethnic connotation excluding most claimants. According to Mathew, Catholicism failed "because it was too modern for Ethiopia."⁵¹ Perhaps so, although he admits that the Catholic "concept of royalty might appeal to the negus but never to his feudatories."⁵² Questions related to the national ideology, to balance of power, to the relation between Church and state were therefore involved.

Likewise, in vain does one attempt to connect the Ethiopian notion of emperorship with the African notion of kingship. Founded on divine right, the African royal power has been described as "divine kingship"⁵³ endowed with sacred authority. Here again, kingship by divine election and divine kingship are totally different. Though revered and in a sense a religious figure by his anointment, the Ethiopian king had no religious function or role. The African king drew his very legitimacy from his religious functions, most of the time associated with the power of magic. The fertility of land, military victories, the coming of the rain, etc., were often

attributed to the magic power of the king, who was therefore a ritual figure. Not so with the Ethiopian king, who was never vested with religious functions; the functional differentiation between Church and state reserved religious roles strictly for the Church.

Attempted parallels between the Japanese and the Ethiopian conceptions of emperorship would be equally futile. The Japanese emperor was of divine origin, being descended from the celestial goddess, Amaterasu, whereas no divine lineage was ascribed to the Ethiopian emperor. Being the instrument of God, his power came from God, but in no way was his person divine. What differentiated him from other human beings was the choice that devolved on him, not his divinity. He was God's favorite, but he had neither divine affiliation nor the power of magic. Moreover, the Solomonic dynasty was not even a lineage dynasty in the proper sense of the word.

If one would find at all costs a counterpart of the Ethiopian imperial system, the monarchy of ancient Egypt would be a better choice. True, there were glaring differences: pharaohs were supposed to be the offspring of the sun-god; they were also ritual agents, in fact the privileged representatives of the community before the gods. Nonetheless, as in Ethiopia, pharaohs were the direct elect of the sun-god and their power did not rest on hereditary principle. The ways of the sun-god being impenetrable, the chosen could be someone outside the established line or even totally external to the court entourage. This does not mean that there was no continuity, that sons of pharaohs did not become kings in their turn. They were certainly better placed than others to assume succession, but their legitimacy was not based on hereditary transmission of power. It sprang from the choice of the sun-god, manifested by such particular signs as oracles, dreams, etc. As stated by one scholar, "the pharaonic legitimacy could not be reduced to a hereditary principle, be it male primogeniture or transmission of blood by women."⁵⁴ Save that in Ethiopia the particulars signs of divine favor were essentially confined to military and leadership qualities, the Ethiopian principle of divine election had manifest similarity to the pharaonic legitimacy.

What we have said so far corroborates what most analysts had suggested, namely that the unity of the Church and the monarchy as conceived in the *Kibre Negest*, really represented the centripetal force against the divisive factors of geography, ethnic loyalties, and regional powers. The specific contribution of the present study is to argue that the struggle

between centripetal and centrifugal forces should not be viewed as an anomaly or even as a chronic shortcoming, for it set the stage for the discourse of the *Kibre Negest*. To quote Perham, the centripetal and centrifugal forces

remained in a permanent tension, the balance swayed from one decade to another; and through the 600 years or more of which we have reliable knowledge, neither side until this century seems to have gained upon the other.⁵⁵

We are tempted to say that it could not and should not have been otherwise, since the very title of the emperor as king of kings presupposed this movement of dispersion constantly countered with a central force. In this way, and in line with the *Kibre Negest*'s definition of him as the elect of God, the emperor became the perpetual unifier of the Christian community. This definition deprived him of hereditary legitimacy while granting him the legitimacy due to a unifier. The *Kibre Negest* itself imparted both dispersion and unification whereby the choice of God was given center-stage. The swinging to and fro of centripetal and centrifugal tendencies constituted the uninterrupted rhythm attuning the Church to the imperial power and celebrating the realization of the writ of the *Kibre Negest*.

The founding role of the *Kibre Negest* will appear with greater clarity if our analysis probes into the relationship between the monarchy and regionalism. More often than not, the tendency is to conceptualize them as opposing forces, rather than composing by their very opposition a structure, a gravitational force holding the country together.

IMPERIAL POWER AND REGIONALISM

Negative assessments of regionalism are commonplace among students of Ethiopian society and history. Regionalism is accused of having retarded, or else obstructed, the full realization of political unity and national consciousness. The title "king of kings" portrays, it is believed, the fact of emperors ruling over "an agglomeration of petty kingdoms,"⁵⁶ the antithesis of a structured and centralized system of government. Regionalism is also blamed for having fostered "parochial sentiments and narrow identities"⁵⁷ based on tribal and linguistic demarcations and constantly at odds with national unity.

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Predictably enough, constant conflicts and internal wars were the major implications of regionalism. For one thing, emperors, though divinely ordained, "had to impose their authority by force, and punitive expeditions were a staple feature of every reign."⁵⁸ The absence of a stable and recognized source of power in turn spurred on numerous claimants. The outcome was constant wars and devastations which, in addition to hindering the development of the country, repeatedly exposed it to external invasions. The reversion to anarchy at the end of every reign was a glaring illustration of this vulnerability. The propensity to live according to legal procedures was also greatly diminished. The principle of "might makes right" marked the Ethiopian mentality to the point of inspiring scorn for all lawful and ordered systems of government. In a word, if the numerous positive borrowings from contact with the external world, such as Christianity, script, the ox-drawn plow, the imperial system, etc., had little progressive effect, the blame should be put on the cycle of anarchy and war fueled by regionalism.

The trouble with this kind of reasoning is that its very excessiveness veils the kernel of truth that it contains. If regionalism had really such disastrous consequences, if it were so opposed to national life and political stability, how comes it, then, that the centripetal forces were strong enough to keep the country together for so long? The whole history of Ethiopia does not make sense if so deeply-rooted a tendency towards political fragmentation existed. A more enlightening approach is to examine regionalism in terms of its positive rather than negative contribution to the unity and survival of Ethiopia. The description of Ethiopian history as the perpetual struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces, though no doubt correct, must not be allowed to darken the other side of the history, but rather should illuminate how imperial and regional powers were so arrayed as to mutually reinforce each other and realize a balance of power.

The antiquity of regionalism in Ethiopia is indication enough that a more positive interpretation is to be sought. The system of "loose federation"⁵⁹ under the king of kings dates back to Aksum. Under difficult geographical conditions, this system made expansion possible, given that expansion could not rely on mere military conquest. As Munro-Hay admits, the process of expansion "arouses a certain amount of admiration."⁶⁰ Only a political system granting large autonomy to the various tribal groups could overcome the difficulties of conquest and the attraction of seclusion. Regionalism must have had seductive traits for natural divisions to be so

easily vanquished. Viewed from this angle, regionalism appears as part of the Ethiopian political system, less of a defect and more of an asset.

First let us try to define in broad terms the contract binding the monarchy and the regional nobility. The traditional signs of loyalty to the king by local rulers consisted, according to Tadesse,

of two acts, both of cardinal importance: the collection and submission of the king's tributes accruing from the region, and the readiness to contribute an adequate fighting force to the king's army during a national crisis or to send contingents against local rebellions in the name of the king when called upon to do so.⁶¹

General as this definition is, it does not specify the political and administrative roles of local leaders. It refers to the economic foundation of the state and to the political function of the monarchy, which were respectively the collection of tributes and the enforcement of defense and order. Local leaders acted both as representatives and assistants in the fulfillment of these two tasks. A question remains: What did they obtain in exchange for their assistance? A contract involves more than one partner; so far we know the rights of only one party.

A possible answer is autonomy: in exchange for their service, the emperor recognized the local leaders as maintaining "full possession of their traditional right of leadership."⁶² But this kind of reasoning is at worst misleading, at best unhelpful. Even if we leave aside the supposition that the imperial conquest must have somehow altered the traditional system of leadership, there remains the fact that the right to collect tributes already implied the effective enforcement of the imperial system. From the imperial conquest, and from that alone, could local leaders derive the right to collect tribute and eventually to retain their own share. What is called traditional right of leadership looks very much like the right accorded by the imperial conquest. In this way the relation between the emperor and local leaders becomes contractual. For their service, local leaders were granted tribute rights, which are from the start imperial rights. Through their participation in the imperial system alone did they acquire new status and economic privileges.

We thus arrive at a daring assumption: far from preceding and challenging the imperial power, the nobility was itself a *product* of the imperial system. Neither its economic interest nor its social status had any founda-

tion outside the imperial order. Few scholars will tolerate this view; yet several arguments emerge in favor of it. The full analysis of the traditional pattern of landholding in Ethiopia will be discussed in the next chapter. For the time being, let us simply say that the communal type of land ownership inherent in the *rist* system posits the right of the nobility as a supervenient or superstructural due. The tribute right supporting the nobility was superimposed on a communal order rather than emanating from it. That this superimposition was an outcome of the imperial mantle is an unavoidable conclusion.

A fine perspective from which to understand the most remarkable feature of Ethiopian traditional political order is thus at our disposal. I have in mind the absence of hereditary nobility in traditional Ethiopia. Whether the concept of feudalism is appropriate or not to the traditional system need not worry us here. Suffice it to allude to the safeness of the position which, without denying the effort of the nobility to change its status into an inherited one and the effective existence of entrenched noble families, still considers the hereditary status more as a claim, an aspiration than as a reality. The counter-forces preventing the evolution into a hereditary nobility were the peasant community and the monarchy. Both have never allowed the development of private ownership of land, so necessary to changing the nobility into a hereditary class. Except for its right to *rist* land as a member of the community, the nobility had only the tribute right granted by emperors. The rank of noble was an imperial appointment for services, especially of military nature, rather than a hereditary position. As Hess emphasizes, in Ethiopia "military rank and noble privilege were identical, and both came from the emperor."⁶³ In short, the possession of land was not the essential attribute of the nobility.

Assuredly, this made the Ethiopian nobility even more dependent on the imperial power. The veracity of this statement is shown by the state of anarchy in which the regional power itself was engulfed whenever struggles for imperial succession developed or emperors had their authority weakened. Having no intrinsic legitimacy outside the imperial consecration, the regional power was immediately affected by crises of succession. Troubles at the imperial level naturally entailed the rise of contentions within the establishment of regional power.

A good illustration of regional anarchy is the Era of the Princes. For most scholars, the disorder of the Era of the Princes was caused by the extreme weakness of the emperors of Gonder. The anarchy developed at

two different levels. Within the regional power itself, local leaders struggled for supremacy. James Bruce has described the rise of Tigre nobles against *Ras Michael*, then the ascending lord of Tigre. According to one of them, the reason for his rebellion is that

he saw no other way of preventing Michael's tyranny and monstrous thrust of money and power: that the Ras was really king, had subverted the constitution, annihilated all differences of rank and persons, and transferred the efficient parts of government into the hands of his own creatures.⁶⁴

Clearly, the whole regional power was in a turmoil: the weakness of the emperor had deprived it of legitimacy and spurred on new claimants.

At the level of the *rases*, anarchy and absence of legitimacy were no less evident. *Ras Michael* could neither usurp the imperial throne nor achieve supremacy over the contending *rases*. Though more powerful than the emperor, none of the regional lords dared to appropriate the throne for himself. Instead, each wanted to control the emperor in order to impart legitimacy to his power and decisions. Portraying the Era of the Princes, Patrick Gilkes writes:

even in these circumstances the nobility, for all their independence, tended to revolve around the imperial throne and to concentrate on the struggle to control it . . . and from about 1780 onwards the history of the Empire is a catalogue of struggles between members of the great nobility to control the Emperor and thus gain control of his land-granting and title-granting powers.⁶⁵

The deep reason for this competition to control the monarchy lay in the very structure of Ethiopian society. Crudely put, in traditional Ethiopia, no person other than the emperor had direct power over another person. Any authority held by a person was a derivation of the imperial power. Outside this devolution, there was no legal power. To the question of why exclusively "power, privilege, and status emanated from the monarchy,"⁶⁶ the absence of social organization based on lineage provides a possible answer.

Bearing in mind that what follows applies only to Amhara and Tigre regions (i.e. to what used to be the traditional northern part of Ethiopia), a comparison with African societies is most enlightening. In traditional

Africa, social groups were structured according to a diffused system of hierarchy and authority known as the kinship system, which established power and authority according to age and sex. The chief was the eldest of the group, be it at the level of the family or the village. This type of organization was general enough for authors to call the African system "gerontocracy"⁶⁷ (rather than democracy, as is so often wrongly held). So natural was this type of organization that the main problem faced by African societies was the imposition of state power and organization on the lineage hierarchy. Where the state emerged, it appeared more as a collection of diverse kinship groups, each with its own hierarchy, than as an integrated whole. These groups "continued to function despite the fate of larger political units."⁶⁸ Small wonder, then, if in Africa stateless societies proliferated and larger political units such as kingdoms and empires proved particularly vulnerable.

Such was not the case in Ethiopia: never was kinship taken as a principle of social organization. The principle of seniority did not go beyond the family, and even there its authority had to come to terms with individualistic leanings. "The homestead" ("the basic ecological and social unit of the Amhara peasantry"⁶⁹) is pinned on "self-sufficiency and autonomy"⁷⁰ so that the village appears more as an external relation than as the ramification of lineage. *Zemed* (parents) are close to an Amhara, but this closeness has no life outside personal ties. In short, the Amhara is totally alien to the idea of conceiving the kin group as "a corporate entity whose interests and identity transcend that of the individual."⁷¹

Since no system of kinship authority structured the traditional society, all power was by definition a delegation of the only source of power, namely the state. The power of the nobility must be placed in this social context. Having no local basis, its power wholly emanated from imperial delegation. True, regional lords could grant titles and lands to their subordinates, but they were doing so in the name of the emperor and as his representatives. The source of power remained the throne, from which all power down to the level of village was derived. The nobility thus generated (whatever its pretension) could not erase the imperial nomination, which buttressed up its status and privileges. So long as this state of things prevailed, the nobility could hardly turn into a hereditary class.

Once the foregoing is clear, all the characters developed by the regional nobility become deducible. The way the whole system revolved around the throne may suggest that emperors had absolute power. Not in the least:

just as the nobility never grew into a hereditary class, so too emperors of Ethiopia, with the notable exception of Haile Selassie, never became absolute monarchs. As Perham puts it:

although the Ethiopian provincial rases were never able to establish for long their position as over-mighty subjects, the Emperors upon their side were unable to consolidate, century after century, the authority of the imperial government.⁷²

A question comes to mind: if, as stated, the nobility was an imperial creation, whence did it derive the strength to limit the power of the throne? This question helps to determine the role of regionalism and ethnicity in traditional Ethiopia. The persistence of regional and ethnic attachments, viewed by many scholars as a regrettable anomaly, evolved from the system itself. It was a cultural trait designed to compensate for the lack of local legitimacy of power. The attachments counterbalanced the central authority, more exactly contributed to installing a kind of power sharing, a balance of power, between central and regional forces.

The process is quite logical: unable to change its status into a hereditary one, the nobility naturally endeavored to become a force to be reckoned with by arousing and fortifying regional and ethnic loyalties wedding it to the community. In default of having a status by itself, it strove to gain some consistency by taking root in regional and ethnic particularities. Leaning on the peasantry with whom it maintained "close kinship ties through descent group affiliation and the traditional system of landholding,"⁷³ it developed alongside the national consciousness narrow identities, batten- ing on tribal, religious, linguistic particularities. Thanks to this local im- plantation, it could no longer be totally ignored. Gebru defends a similar idea:

The physical remoteness of the monarch, combined with the nobility's embeddedness in the local economy and its strong cul- tural ties to the peasantry, allowed local barons to exert greater and direct influence on the latter and to limit the throne's authority and its intrusive tendencies.⁷⁴

Traditional regional and ethnic attachments were therefore a device to limit the imperial power, to achieve a form of power sharing. Even if it did not change the nobility into a hereditary class, at least it provided it with

some kind of cultural legitimacy or entitlement. However, a one-sided view of this power limitation would be misleading. The implantation of the nobility in the countryside was as much a limitation of the imperial power as it was the source of monarchical strength. The ability of the nobility to mobilize and control the peasants depended on the latter's endorsement as well as on the former's leadership qualities. It was in the best interest of monarchs that local leaders strengthen their control over the peasantry. Only in this way could the nobility properly assume the tasks of collecting taxes on a regular basis and mobilizing an adequate military force during national crises. The *raison d'être* of regional power was not confined to limiting the central power; it also supplied the economic and military support from which emperors drew much of their might. All this rested on the nobility's "capacity to muster economic and military resources, which ultimately meant the control of the peasantry, its labor and products."⁷⁵ A mere cosmopolitan nobility would have difficulty in achieving this level of control.

In passing, the view according to which ethnic ideology emanated from the peasantry is scarcely defensible. The view describes the peasantry as a cultural force, as a "source of linguistic and secular cultural diversity within the nationhood."⁷⁶ Thanks to peasant ethnic attachments, so the argument proceeds, the domination of one ethnic group over other groups or their assimilation into one ethnic group is effectively countered. This scholarly tendency to root ethnic ideology in the peasantry rather than in the nobility is designed to endow ethnicity with a noble cause. Yet peasant ethnic allegiances do not go beyond the sense of membership of a community; at any rate, they do not inspire a political attitude, still less a combative ideology, as they are not invoked for the purpose of power struggle. Only when elites use ethnicity for power control does it turn into contention, and hence into ideology motivating a definite political attitude. One must distinguish the politicization of ethnic loyalties from the natural sense of communal membership.

Regarding traditional Ethiopia, other than limiting the imperial power by providing the nobility with a local legitimacy, ethnic attitudes did not convey the modern sense of animosity. In fact, had the Ethiopian nobility developed into a hereditary nobility, most probably provincialism would have disappeared long ago by the complete integration of ruling elites and the fostering of a cosmopolitan, uniform aristocratic culture. Just as happened in feudal Europe, such a culture would have buried ethnic distinc-

tion and pluralism. The persistence of parochial identities having its source in the need to underpin the aristocracy by local and regional links, the transformation of the nobility into a hereditary landed class would have promoted a class culture, free from ethnic devotion and peasant references. If, as observed by many students of Ethiopia, the Ethiopian nobility never developed an elitist culture distinct from the peasantry, this fact emanated from the deep need to preserve its ties with local communities.

What is more, these ties also served well the peasantry. Provincialism limited the power of emperors over the nobility, but even more so the power of the nobility over the peasantry. We have already indicated how persistently the communal system of *rist* deterred the promotion of the nobility to a hereditary status. We now see how difficult it would be for local and regional lords to take root in the local community without respecting its traditional mode of life. This requirement enabled peasants to protect their rights against their own local leaders. Especially, a positive response among the peasants in time of war was essential for lords to fulfill their obligations to the emperor and thus preserve their ranks. Lords could not act as local potentates without seriously impairing their power base. A local tyrant was no challenge to the emperor and was immediately removed at the instigations of peasant rebellions and requests. The need to cultivate ethnic identity, while it facilitated the immersion of regional lords in the communal life, also guarded traditional peasant rights against local tyrants.

Economic reasons also justified the preference of peasants for kinspersons rather than outsiders at the level of local and regional positions of power. This "peculiar coincidence of peasants' class interests with those of local elites"⁷⁷ was based on the fact that the nomination of outsiders as governors meant, with all their new entourage, a new distribution of land. This further fragmentation of landholdings was avoided with the maintenance of local leaders who, having already their share in the *rist* system, would not impose a new redistribution.

Oddly enough, the role of geographical factors in the persistence of regionalism was negligible. Regionalism was due more to political requirement than to geographical necessity. It was a political organization whereby a balance of power implying autonomy and devolution of power was achieved. What is more, such a type of decentralized political structure was inevitable. Given the stage of social development and the absence of modern means of centralization, emperors were in no position to rule in a

centralized fashion a country as large, diverse, and geographically fragmented as Ethiopia. Sheer impossibility of centralized administration already justifies the option for a decentralized political order.

This decentralization, the argument goes, perhaps necessary from the viewpoint of means, has unfortunately put on ethnic trimmings, damaging national unity. Maybe so. However, a deeper investigation into the reason why the nobility had to assume a parochial identity, besides the need to insufflate some kind of consistency into its status, will get us to the heart of the Ethiopian value system, namely social mobility. The thorough discussion of social mobility is the purpose of our next chapter. Let us here simply say that the ethnic element played its part in the pursuit of social mobility. The absence of lineage hierarchy and hereditary entitlement could not but increase the importance of personal ties and patronage in achieving social promotion. Naturally, ethnic ties must have suffused this system of patronage. The perseverance of ethnic mentality in Ethiopia is then best explained if we try to understand the function it played in the system. Given the existence of social mobility, the denser ethnic connections are, the higher is their usefulness to social advancement. If social ascent depends even remotely on relations with those who control power, this is enough to enhance the value of ethnic links. As observed by Gebru, "clientalism, which often drew from the affective ties of ethnicity, religion, and region, was the grid of politics, underpinning power relations in the monarchical state."⁷⁸

There is really no need to oppose regionalism to national life. In the context of traditional Ethiopia, regionalism was a force of stability rather than division. Emperors, though quite powerful at times, continued to rely on emerging regional forces because they considered them to be more a source of stability than disorder. A well entrenched regional *ras* may be an opponent of the emperor, but even more so a source of order and higher economic returns for both of them.

One Ethiopian author who comes out strongly in favor of this view on the role of regionalism is Zewde Gabre-Sellassie. In his book *Yohannes IV of Ethiopia*, he compares Yohannes's method of ruling with that of Tewodros. He concludes that Yohannes was more successful in the unification of Ethiopia than Tewodros because he stuck to the traditional methods and values.⁷⁹ He did not try to impose a modern, centralized system; nor did he upset the regional power by frequently changing the lords. According large autonomy, and thus avoiding unnecessary power struggle,

he relied on regional lords to unite and consolidate the country. His careful policy and wise acceptance of autonomy created a viable state machinery.

However arguable Zewde's view may be, it finds its justification in the difficulties faced by those emperors who sought to impose a centralized government. Especially, we know how Haile Selassie's policy of tight centralization led to growing disaffection against Shewan domination to the point of tinting ethnic resentments with nationalist colors. Moreover, this same centralization had so reduced "the capacity of the regional nobility to act as intermediaries between central government and the countryside"⁸⁰ that no regional force could come in support of Haile Selassie. The monarchy was easily overthrown by movements expressing essentially urban discontents. In effect, such was the organic link between the monarchy and the regional nobility that the fall of the former implacably entailed the fall of the latter.

The opposition of the regional nobility to centralization was a manifestation of the deep, cultural roots of regionalism. In traditional Ethiopia, power was never centralized and social status made heritable, because of the conception positing power essentially as an object of contest. The source of power being the choice of God, no human institution should bar the free manifestation of this choice. As a matter of fact, anyone was a potential candidate for any position of power. Regionalism carried this message: it permitted a greater system of competition, a more open society, and came out against the tendency to render power absolute. You can exercise power absolutely, but you cannot turn it into an exclusive right: such was its pronouncement. It thus opened the valve for rivals, just as it instituted the obligation for those in power, especially emperors, to prove their election through deeds of merit. Once the demonstration was done, social acceptance followed naturally.

ETHIOPIAN NATIONHOOD

The true meaning and place of regionalism thus clarified, we can now proceed with the study of the attributes of Ethiopian nationhood. Though scholars generally acknowledge the fact of Ethiopian nationalism, the presence of strong regional and ethnic loyalties renders their approach somewhat ambiguous. Unable to deny the nationalist commitment but compelled to take into consideration ethnic and regional feelings, their pro-

nouncements on Ethiopian nationalism have a wavering character. The way we have conceptualized regional and ethnic feelings, however, should greatly assist in the elucidation of the national consciousness.

The general tendency is to ground Ethiopian nationalism in Orthodox Christianity. This kind of identification is more of a problem than a solution; not because it is spurious, but rather because it does not make sense to derive from Christianity alone a national sentiment. Christianity is by definition a universalist religion. Far from delineating a given people, it strives to embrace all humanity regardless of race, tribe, geography, and socio-economic formation. Nationalism, on the contrary, feeds on peculiarities; it is keen to stress distinctive traits and particular historical experience. It relies on what differentiates peoples rather than on what they have in common.

So Ethiopian Christianity would not have generated a national consciousness, had it not been associated with a particularism which individualized it, made it distinct from all other "Christian" nations. What could be the element which infused particularism? It cannot be any of the characters related to the religious dogma or to its particular customs. These may be the sparks of the national identity, but not the source of identification. Apart from being in its essential aspects typical to the Orthodox Church itself, the singularity ensuing from such and such traits of the Ethiopian Church (for instance, the use of Geez as a liturgical language) is more a manifestation of nationalism than a cause. The cause must be a nativistic development generating a national religion to the detriment, in a sense, of the putative universality of Christianity.

Of all the probable causes of this conversion of a universalist religion into a national one, the prime suspect is the association of the religious belief with the imperial throne. In other words, the source of Ethiopian nationalism is the myth enshrined in the *Kibre Negest*, whose concrete outcome was the birth of "the Orthodox state."⁸¹ The blend of the religious and the political is the crucible of the Ethiopian national identity.

Its power to impart particularism leaps to the eye when we see how little Christian is this teaming of the faith with a political exigency. Indeed, it seems to go against the Christian precept of distinguishing God from Caesar, the religious from the secular. Instead, it appears to agree with the ideal of an Islamic state, endeavoring to make sure that in terms of responsibility "God's and Caesar's were the same."⁸²

One may object by saying that the fusion of Church and state is a principle inherent in the Orthodox Church. Yes, but the Ethiopian originality was in the association of the Church with a particular dynasty, the Solomonic line, so that the fusion was not merely an abstract principle. From the amalgamation, itself being part of the belief, of the Christian community with the particular dynastic line grew the specific religious identity. It effectively generated a national identity insofar as allegiance to the imperial throne was part and parcel of the belief. No longer could the belief define itself apart from the imperial throne, that is, apart from the political rule demarcating a given people and territory. In a word, through this political appendage, Christianity was naturalized. To be a Christian in Ethiopia was not simply to adhere to the creed; it was also a naturalization, an admittance to citizenship by way of allegiance to a secular power.

This may explain the lack of missionary zeal pointed out by many scholars. Christianity was not to be propagated for its own sake, in line with the evangelical spirit alone. Implying naturalization, absorption in the Ethiopian state, it took upon itself the task of turning converts into nationals. Consequently, evangelization and the expansion of the Ethiopian state went hand in hand. This conjunction did not encourage the rise of an independent evangelical spirit. Depending on new conquests of the state, evangelization was necessarily slow and selective.

How, then, can one account for the relationship existing between this national consciousness and ethnic and regional identifications? Since they appear to contradict each other, ethnic and regional attachments should be remnants, and the national ideology the dominant instance. Or else the national consciousness was a supra-consciousness imposed on a substratum of regional and ethnic commitments. The first case gives the national ideology too much weight, inasmuch as centuries of common existence did not seem to weaken the parochial commitments; in the second, the national ideology is belittled, becoming almost a superficial attachment. Knowing how central Christianity and the monarchy were to Ethiopian life, every approach reducing the national commitment to a superficial feeling is perforce doubtful. One must be beware falling victim to a retrospective logic. Because Ethiopia is at present experiencing a crisis of identity brought by the ordeals of modernization, it does not mean that such was consistently the case in the past. Had this been the case, the survival of Ethiopia would become an unfathomable mystery. Such a weak national feeling would not have achieved the protracted independence of

the country. Neither would it have nourished the unrelenting willingness to defend this independence by dearly paid sacrifices.

In reality, one is not obliged to conceive of the national identity and parochial feelings as though they were in constant tension. They coexisted fairly in harmony, each responding to solicitations which were more complementary than antagonistic. As we said, ethnic attachments were bound to the system of regional power whereby power sharing and autonomy were secured. Scholars err when they construe the ethnic consciousness as an independent center of loyalty, essentially opposed to the national one and struggling against it. This point is made clear by a careful inspection of the national consciousness.

What militates so strongly in favor of allocating greater space to the national sentiment is the role, already discussed, of the monarchical state. Nothing is more mistaken than the view describing the Ethiopian state as a collection of small kingdoms. Pre-existing small kingdoms were not brought together to make up an empire; rather, the imperial power created regional powers in its own image through a process of local crystallization. The regional power thus brought into being was not independent, still less opposed to the imperial throne. It may rise against an individual emperor, but it was fundamentally wedded to the imperial system to which it owed its very existence. In this regard, a comparison between the Ethiopian state and the traditional political systems of Africa can be enlightening.

Africa has known various political systems, ranging from small stateless societies to kingdoms and large empires. Whatever the type involved, *self-governing lineages* remained the center and basis of all African political systems; they "were as important in large states as they were in areas of decentralized political authority."⁸³ Not only was kingship itself referred to the king's lineage, but in the empires and large states provincial rulers owed their position to their lineage. The state, however powerful and large, was actually superimposed on a system of power based on lineages that it could neither dissolve nor transcend. It is best defined as a collection of autonomous, self-governing lineages. Hence the chronic tendency of empires and kingdoms to break down into small chiefdoms on the slightest pretext, be it a problem of succession, war with neighboring states, etc. If anything, the empires were most wanting in durability, as evinced by the dissolution of the empires of Ghana, Mali, Kongo, Songhai. In fact, every expanding state was compelled to incompatible choices. Either it would nominate as territorial chiefs the lineage chiefs themselves (in which case it



had no basis of its own) or else it would appoint royal dependents as governors over and above the lineages chiefs (but then it could not ensure its stability).⁸⁴ Fragmentation was thus inscribed in the heart of African political systems.

However extensive the autonomy of Ethiopian regionalism may have been, no student of Ethiopian history can seriously forward the view that it was impelled by a similar tendency to political and ideological dispersion. The misunderstanding stems from the confusion of power struggle with the tendency to dispersion. Power struggle was the driving force of the Ethiopian society (even emperors were contested); but never did it imply an inclination to political disunity or a rejection of Ethiopian nationhood. How could it be so when regionalism itself had no intrinsic power base and no principle of separate identification such as those provided by lineage? The regional power was a focus of power competition, less so a source of distinct identification and power legitimation. But while African lineages were self-sufficient in terms of power distribution, social organization, and ideology, no such centers existed in Ethiopian regionalism.

Still, underlining the multi-ethnic composition of Ethiopia, some scholars will maintain that "no other path to re-unification . . . existed outside the throne and the Church."⁸⁵ For one thing, this is already more than enough. But what is not acceptable is the supposition that ethnic homogeneity is essential in order for there to be a nation; neither logic nor facts support the supposition.

Indeed, cases of ethnically and culturally homogeneous peoples being reluctant to come under one state are hardly rare. In this regard, the Somali case is quite telling. Here is a people which is ethnically one, shares the same culture, and speaks the same language. Even if we cannot exclude the contribution of external factors in the creation of the existing state of anarchy and disbandment, there is no doubt that these factors have banked on pre-existing cleavages. What undermined the Somali state was the same lineage politics which, as elsewhere in Africa, still defies the creation of viable states. The Somali state was in truth a collection of "several major tribal groupings"⁸⁶ which decomposed at the slightest ordeal. Notwithstanding rabid nationalism, Markakis says it is difficult to find a Somali politician "who would place the interests of the nation above those of the clan, or who would act politically in a way independent of clan affiliation."⁸⁷

Outside Africa, there is the case of the noisy yet constantly postponed longing for Arab unity. Here also we have a people united by race, religion, language, and history, yet, all these factors of unity are not strong enough to create a serious movement of unity able to demolish the borders of colonial legacy. Contrast the effort of the various Arab states, as they now exist, to create viable nations and the lack of political determination on the part of those states when it comes to constructing Arab unity. It is one thing to affirm common identity and express the wish to live together, quite another to make this wish a political reality. The latter would require that tribal affiliations and existing political realities with their class interests be overcome for the sake of unity. Yet the same theoreticians who find the Ethiopian allegiance to the throne and the Church insufficient to establish a nation speak of dispersed peoples with *no* historical experience of political unity as constituting nations, just because they are ethnically one, use the same language, etc. In reality, the abyss separating the ideal and the real hinders these imaginary nations from coming to be.

The problem of nationalism is often vitiated by the inability of scholars to take account of all the factors involved. To stress one factor only or to underestimate the absence of another factor is to compound the problem. Nationalism requires a move towards large groupings going beyond lineage; it is not an outgrowth of lineage mentality, as it presupposes the generation of a different and higher loyalty. Lineage-bound societies, whatever their ethnic and linguistic resemblances, are as far apart from each other as are two different natural species. Nationalism dictates the transgression of these naturally closed societies, thereby evincing its cultural rather than ethnic nature. Nations emerge as cultural events, never as mere extensions of ethnic identity.

The importance of the cultural dimension appears clearly if we take, for instance, the case of India. Despite a history fraught with successive invasions and ethnic mixtures, the situation is still the existence side by side of communities defined by distinct religious and linguistic traits. This propensity to generate distinct communities has doubtless slowed down India's progress towards modern nationalism. A major cause for this is believed to be Hinduism⁸⁸ itself. The fragmentation proper to Hinduism, with each community having its own caste systems, distinct deities, religious norms, and feasts as well as diverse forms of cult and piety, is no incentive to political unity. If religious fragmentation can retard political unity, how much more so lineage ideology whose segmentation is even tighter?

Far from growing from ethnicity, the forced coexistence under one state of diverse ethnic groups has often developed nationalism, obliged as these groups were to produce a supra-ethnic consciousness. Cultural crossbreeding and mutual tolerance have worked out a kind of *modus vivendi* facilitating integration, and still later the rise of the democratic spirit. At any rate, such was the evolution of European feudalism. The dispersal of sovereignty characteristic of European feudalism at first "allowed the consolidation of ethnic and linguistic plurality."⁸⁹ However, this same diversity, taken together with the universal Church and under the aegis of the absolutist state, "prepared the possibility of a multi-national state system in the epoch of its subsequent transition to capitalism."⁹⁰ In thus evolving out of pluralism, nationalism reveals itself as a form of integration sustained by cultural crossbreeding. It is a supra-ethnic consciousness created by population movements, cultural exchanges, religious universalism, economic expansion, and monarchical states. Historical events have often encouraged it, sometimes suppressed it. Still, it was born of these events, which brought together peoples with different beliefs and customs by compelling them to mutual adjustment.

In this regard, the case of France, frequently cited as a model of state-derived nationalism, is instructive. France

created a remarkable degree of cultural unity among people who spoke languages as different as French, Breton, Basque, German, Flemish, Occitan, and Provençal and who were culturally diverse in other respects as well."⁹¹

This homogenization resulted from "the existence of a large political unit, ruling over a particular territory for a long period of time."⁹² Since state power preceded and created French nationhood, the domination of one ethnic group over the others was inevitable. But so was the large cultural crossbreeding which shaped the multifarious and rich culture of French society. It should come as no surprise if a culture so enriched gave birth to the ideas of the French Enlightenment and Revolution from which the world has abundantly benefited. What is said here is equally applicable to English and American societies. Only a mind gravely truncated by ethnic obscurantism can disparage this model of nation-building.

To be sure, ignorance of world history alone can declare a form of nationalism based on the unity of Church and state entirely insufficient. For instance, one author hesitates to consider Ethiopia as a nation-state on

the ground that the "primary loyalties" of the people "are to the Emperor rather than the nation," even though he defines the emperor as "the supreme symbol of the highest political and religious values."⁹³ What else is needed, one might ask, to make up a nation?

Let us take the Reformation, widely believed to be a major source of British nationalism. Anglicanism originated from "the removal of Papal authority," which removal prepared the ground for "the alliance of Church and State."⁹⁴ The idea was that state and Church should be united—that faith, though personal, must be incorporated into the state so as to avoid conflicts of loyalty. This resulted in the king becoming the head of the English Church. The outcome recalls the Ethiopian case, where too the supply of a secular reference to a universalist spiritual belief contrived nationalism. There is nothing barbaric about the concept of national religion, given the existence of "the pervasive idea of the national religion in such countries as England and Sweden."⁹⁵ Still less is it a floating notion, since an historical event as important as the Reformation became a drive towards the national religion whose consequence has been the modernization of Europe.

To give an idea of the impact of Ethiopian national religion, of the magnetic force emanating from the fusion of state and Church, let us compare it with the state of Islam in Ethiopia. Markakis writes:

Muslim groups in Ethiopia have led isolated lives, with little communication among themselves and only a dim awareness of each other's existence. Unlike Christianity, Islam has found no institutional expression on the national level; it has not provided an ideological framework for unity among its heterogeneous following, nor even a common tradition binding all the faithful. In other words, Islam has not transcended ethnic and cultural barriers to bring a measure of unity to the diverse and widely distributed groups which adhere to this faith.⁹⁶

In the Ethiopian Christian community, as in the Muslim community, diversity is high, but it stands out against a strong background of unity founded on the overt collusion of Christian belief with state power. Without this association, the Christian community would have been as dispersed as the Muslim community.

No doubt, this political complicity has profoundly affected the nature of the belief. The definition of the Ethiopian belief as mere Christianity is

abstract and does not go far enough. The connivance with the state has so altered the belief that it has difficulty even now to conceive itself outside the context of unity. More than a mere religious belief, it has become a code of life in reference to which political and sociological values are conceptualized and approved. Trimingham could find no other term than to call it "moribund Christianity," which, as a "symbol of national independence to be guarded at all costs . . . degenerated still further into a form of higher tribal religion isolated in a sea of Islam."⁹⁷

In view of the significant size of the Islamic community, its fragmentation—above all, its inability to express itself at the national level—unmistakably points to a major deficiency of modern Ethiopian nationalism. This state of things is due partly to the essence of Islam itself (whose strong universalism does not lend itself to couplings with secular loyalties of the sort that can grow into a national religion) and partly to the inability of Ethiopian nationhood to modernize itself by going beyond the traditional definition so as to incorporate the Muslim community. While this evolution may have been unnecessary in traditional Ethiopia, where Muslims were a minority, such is no longer the case in the wake of the southern expansion. This problem of modernizing Ethiopian nationhood will be discussed later; our purpose here is to suggest that, simply because modern Ethiopia faces a problem of assimilation, this does not mean that assimilation was weak or non-existent in the past.

In fact, traditional Ethiopia fulfilled in all respects the criteria of nationhood, however strictly they may be defined. An author not particularly convinced about the viability of Ethiopia as a nation writes that, overriding the Amhara-Tigre rivalry, traditional Ethiopia had "a common imperial past, a common culture and religion, and unity against Islam."⁹⁸ Already that is more than enough. But more yet, it even fits Stalin's definition of nation, which is that a nation is "*a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.*"⁹⁹

Not a single element seems to be missing. The requirement of a stable, historically constituted community is the very topic of the present study: the survival of a people united for many centuries. The community of language may be disputed, but without losing sight of the fact that in traditional Ethiopia Geez was the common liturgical as well as the exclusive literary language until the nineteenth century. Of no small significance also is the close relatedness of Geez to Amharic and Tigrinya. Com-

mon territory poses no problem. Neither does the economic foundation, as in traditional Ethiopia the *rist* system prevailed all over. The community of psychological formation was obvious: common Christian values and customs molded the same political and sociological structures. Be it noted that Stalin's definition refuses to identify nation with race or tribe, rightly stressing the magnitude of the historical factor, without which these common traits cannot be forged.

Nevertheless, scholars do not hesitate to call this historically forged unity "spurious" because it was "fragmented by political and linguistic divisions" and "was only directed outwards."¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, these authors never indicate whether they are referring to traditional Ethiopia (usually known as Abyssinia) or to modern Ethiopia (such as it became after Menelik's expansionist policy). Not that the indication would fundamentally change the problem, but because it would help to specify it further. For what must be underlined above all is that *Ethiopian nationhood*, whether it applied to Abyssinia or modern Ethiopia, was and still is *historical* and *cultural*. Even in traditional Ethiopia it has never been ethnic and could not have been so without an essential corruption of its essence.

Nor can the survival of ethnic and linguistic divisions be taken as an argument against the validity of Ethiopian nationhood, since strictly speaking it fulfills all the required criteria. A more fruitful approach would have been to understand the subsistence of these features as a character of Ethiopian nationalism, as a specificity such as it exists every time there is a manifestation of the universal. In effect, the reason for the maintenance of these features is, as we saw, the impossibility of Ethiopian polity to develop into a feudal society. The hindrance was a historical as well as a cultural peculiarity, and as such part of the national character.

Of crucial importance indeed is the historical and cultural essence of Ethiopian nationalism. In particular, it maintains its full viability with respect to the southern expansion because, being a cultural and not a racial or tribal identity, it is thoroughly propitious for integration. Just as the persistence of Amhara and Tigre tribal and linguistic traits does not militate against Ethiopian nationhood, so should not the existence of distinct Oromo, Gurage, or Wollaita identities pose a particular problem for assimilation. Had Ethiopian identity been ethnic or racial, the obstacle would have been greater. It is not and has never been so. Essentially cultural and historical, it has specifically assumed a supra-ethnic texture. So no one

should uphold the view that the harborage of ethnic diversity renders Ethiopian nationhood spurious.

Nor should one underestimate the impact of being united in the struggle against Islam. If we are to believe Trimingham, the sense of exclusive oneness is the most important factor of national identity. He writes:

Neither common blood, common culture, religion, language, nor political organization can in themselves make a nation. The Greeks, for instance, had a complicated ancestry, spoke different dialects, and clung to the autonomy of separate city-states, yet behind all these factors making for separatism, they felt a sense of oneness against the rest of the world. So it has been with Abyssinia.¹⁰¹

If the sense of oneness against the world has such an impact, then how much more compelling may it be when this oneness rests, as was the case with Ethiopia, on the defense of a common religious belief which, moreover, decreed allegiance to the monarchy? To argue that this sense of oneness was superficial because it was directed against the external is an inconsistent objection. The sense of oneness was not a mere feeling; it involved a system of values and a socio-political organization, all designed to ensure resistance and survival. Since the economic, social, and political organization as well as the major values were the frame of the oneness, the question of survival is the royal road to the understanding of the Ethiopian national character.

Christopher Clapham has tried to suggest the cultural nature of Ethiopian identity by the concept of "the plasticity of Amhara—and hence, in a sense, of Ethiopian identity."¹⁰² His point is that Amhara identity must not be associated with "the descent-based ethnic identities characteristic of many other African societies."¹⁰³ Had it been so, the Amhara would not have been the cement of Ethiopian unity. Through successive enlargements, this plasticity has crisscrossed Ethiopia with supra-ethnic consciousness. Amhara is not so much an ethnic group as a cultural attitude, and as such tending to assimilate other groups because it is not defined according to ethnic properties. It is "much more a matter of how one behaves than of who one's parents were."¹⁰⁴

This kind of analysis is likely to provoke the general outcry of all those who are more attentive to Amhara domination. Though their reaction is justified, it does not invalidate Clapham's analysis, as he himself accounts for the steering of plasticity towards domination by the emergence of "a

modernizing autocracy"¹⁰⁵ whose failures distorted Ethiopian nationhood. And distortion does not mean non-existence; above all, it does not alter the fact that to be an Ethiopian was never tantamount to being Tigre or Amhara in the ethnic sense of these words. Clapham's statement simply implied that this non-ethnic identity was more visible in the Amhara than in other ethnic groups, just as their contribution to spreading it was higher.

The meaning of the Solomonic dynasty and the power struggle with which it was congested should now gain clarity. Not being based on a descent-based ethnic identity, the Solomonic dynasty displayed no similarity to the African type of royal lineage. Nor did it correspond to the European model of closed dynastic families. The numerous marriages and secondary unions do not permit us to think in terms of family. Since neither primogeniture nor any other strict rule of legitimacy was instituted, "all male children, who were accorded a certain recognition, shared in the privileges of this [Solomonic] high descent."¹⁰⁶ In a word, they "were all potential emperors."¹⁰⁷ The frequency of tribal intermarriages combined with the Ethiopian bilateral descent group divested the Solomonic line of all ethnic and familial contour. Because of this, candidates from Tigre, Shewa, Gonder could all claim to belong to the same Solomonic line. One need not even be a noble to aspire to Solomonic privileges. Tewodros, who certainly never belonged to the higher strata of Ethiopian nobility, claimed Solomonic descent without much difficulty.

Such a wide and flexible system of affiliation was more cultural than dynastic in the true sense of the word. From its flexibility flowed the free interpretation allowing individuals from different ethnic groups to exact the throne. The qualification "Solomonic" signified power and wisdom rather than blood relation. Among all the contenders that claimant was Solomonic who compelled recognition because of his military and leadership qualities. This is certainly the very meaning of the elect, which can hardly be ethnically defined. Doubtless, the Solomonic dynasty was a concept of unification, a supra-tribal loyalty. It applied to individuals who, beyond ethnic membership, came out winners from the power struggle; it was "something personal and not dynastic."¹⁰⁸ Because of their wealth and position, members of the higher sphere of the nobility were better placed than others to wage successfully the power struggle, but they did not have the monopoly of legitimacy. In this regard, Haile Selassie's origin is instructive: one would find his share of Amhara blood to be no more than one-third, yet it did not prevent him from quietly claiming Solomonic descent.

The importance of power struggle and, hence, the use of the Solomonic term to justify "personal ambition"¹⁰⁹ become manifest when we take account of the frequency of betrayals, even at the highest level. The power struggle went unabated even when external enemies were menacing. Thus, Tewodros was betrayed by Yohannes, who would be betrayed in turn by Menelik. The idea of ascribing these duplicities to the lack of nationalist feeling would lead us astray. If anything, they highlight the centrality of power struggle—for which all means were justified, provided that unification of the country under the victorious emperor was its goal. Never were the betrayals intended to support the design of external foes.

There is a possible objection: if the Solomonic myth had no ethnic background, how did it come about that it could not accommodate the Zagwe kings? The Zagwe dynasty, although profoundly Christian, was overthrown by the Amhara king, Yekuno Amlak. What is more, the event amounted to a restoration: usurpers were ousted and "the throne was once again occupied by a Semitic-speaking monarch."¹¹⁰ There is also the suggestion that Tigre and Amhara collaborated on restoring the Semitic dynasty. Even the tradition has it that the last Zagwe king, at the instigation of Saint Takle Haymanot, willingly relinquished the throne, as though he were convinced of his own illegitimacy.

Most scholars doubt this interpretation. Probably, they say, the Zagwe king was overthrown by sheer force. This brings us back to a more familiar course: legitimacy lies less in the so-called Semitic blood than in military superiority. Nevertheless, the suggestion of a peaceful handover is interesting. The likelihood being that the story was created after the dethronement of the Zagwe rule, it had at least one purpose: to induce the Zagwe themselves to agree to the *coup d'état* so as to avoid the institution of a rival dynasty, which would be fatal to the unity of the country. Thus, only in the name of the Solomonic dynasty was power struggle sanctioned in Ethiopia. As anybody could claim it, in effect there was no rival dynasty in Ethiopia and could never be. The mistake of the Zagwe was their reluctance to claim Solomonic descent from the start, thereby introducing the specter of a rival dynasty. The overthrow of the Zagwe was indeed a restoration—not of an ethnic dynasty, but of the Solomonic myth.

To sum up, the essential point about Ethiopian identity was its cultural nature. Its mission was not to dissolve ethnic identities, but to unite them by a supra-ethnic consciousness. Obviously, this kind of identity was molded by the need to defend Christianity, implacably besieged by a hostile envi-

ronment. This need soldered religious belief to the imperial throne, thus creating both a national religion and a theocratic nation-state. The very meaning of Ethiopian nationalism was inlaid in the role of guardianship of a religious faith. The fact that the faith found shelter in Ethiopia fed, in turn, on the sense of divine election of its people.

We may go even further by adding that the much publicized struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces show how the legend of guardianship was lived through, how it acquired the form of eternal recurrence. The triumph of the emperor over his opponents evinced his election and, by the same token, realized the unity of the religious and the political. The struggle for imperial power being at the very core of the myth itself, the guardianship secured the best of leaders. Wrongly scholars saw the work of centrifugal forces when for the Ethiopians it was divine election in action. From centrifugal forces, there grew unity, as the victorious emperor changed competition into a renewed commitment to unity. This flexible yet binding unity should remove the astonishment of many scholars at the Ethiopian capacity for resurgence. No event better illustrates this tenacity than the rise of Tewodros. While Ethiopia was going through the most enduring drive towards disunity, during the Era of the Princes, there came Tewodros, "ordained by God to unify and lead his people."¹¹¹ What else could renew the divine entrustment by crushing the divisive forces but Tewodros's adornment with the invincible might of God? In fact, he was announced and expected by the nation so that his "initial success, following a bitter experience of anarchy and dismemberment, set up the biblical concept of the chosen leader as a dominant factor in the minds of the people."¹¹²

THE IDEOLOGICAL FORTRESS

The revival power embedded in the Solomonic myth enables us to proceed to the concrete analysis of its contribution to the survival of Ethiopia. So far indicated, the major force of Ethiopian resistance emanated from its unity. We have defined this unity as national consciousness whose two pillars were Orthodox Christianity and the monarchy. How did these two pillars interact to produce an overall effect of unyielding resistance?

The religious belief itself contains remarkable factors of obstinacy. Take, for instance, the notion of the chosen people. The characterization of the Ethiopians as followers of Orthodox Christianity is doubtless important,

but it does not make us feel the reason for "the fanatical adherence of Ethiopia to the monophysite doctrine."¹¹³ In fact the Ethiopians do not consider themselves as mere adherents to Orthodox Christianity. Nor is it very helpful to restrict their unity to their simple awareness of a common religious identity. We must go further and reach the supervenient motive responsible for the fanatical attachment.

Whence could the devotion stem if not from the calling launched by the myth? Owing to this calling, the Ethiopians were followers of the religious belief, but even more so its defenders, protectors. They owed their status as the chosen people to this special divine allotment. As guardians, they did more than adhere to the faith and obey its prescriptions; they had the obligation of being its soldiers. The wider the expansion of Islam and the consequent isolation of the Ethiopians, the deeper was their impression of being the last stronghold of Christianity, which stronghold had to withstand at all costs. The Ethiopians had to hold out, for such was their entrustment, their vocation. More than a mere aspiration, Christianity had thus become a fate; better still, a passion. To be a good Christian was for the Ethiopians not reduced to accepting the creed and fulfilling its orders; it added a martial commitment. On the basis of this commitment, the Church and the imperial throne were knitted together. This martial vocation, be it noted, was not comparable to the Islamic *Jihad*. It was a response to Islam with the assignment to resist, to stand fast, not to spread the faith through conquest.

Imagine how easily this sense of divine mission can fill the heart with confidence. Powerful though invaders may be, Ethiopia cannot lose, for it carries out the assignment of God and thus benefits from His protection. Greenfield notes that the biblical phrase "Ethiopia stretches her hands towards God" was in frequent use,¹¹⁴ especially in times of ordeal. Menelik used it when he rejected the Italian protectorate. It became a watchword during the Italian occupation. The belief of being the direct instrument of God turned events into a divine drama in which victory was perforce reserved to the favorite. Each invader was painted as the instrument of evil, intent on violating a sanctuary. This could only arouse the wrath of God, whose weapon of punishment was none other than the imperial might. In thus construing invasions in biblical terms, the Ethiopians converted their history into a theodicy, all to their advantage.

This belief had its corollary: danger looms whenever Ethiopia abandons its divine assignment or proves unworthy of it. Then it suffers God's

punishment: disasters, such as invasion, famine, drought, epidemic pounce on the Ethiopians. Reconciliation with God passes through intense prayers, fasts, mortifications, and renewal of commitment. Thus, the Era of the Princes was a punishment for deviation from the Solomonic tradition. For order and unity to return, tradition had to be restored. Because Tewodros conceptualized the situation in these terms, his "inspiration for national restoration was largely medieval, entailing the revival of Solomonic kingship, to which the Church was central."¹¹⁵ In interpreting national crises as punishments due to deviations from tradition, the Ethiopians had devised the possibility of indefinite revival. As a punishment for infringement, a disaster was never final, irremediable. Rather, it promised salvation on condition that restoration was sought. Hence the salvational role of the Solomonic myth: it repelled disasters because the reinstatement of the unity of the religious and the political paved the way for God's mercy.

With respect to resistance, the contribution of the properly Christian elements of the faith was not negligible. That Christianity allowed Ethiopia to take a stand that other African countries could not take can hardly be gainsaid. In particular, it withdrew the credibility of the colonial ideology pertaining to the superiority of the West and its so-called civilizing mission. The possibility of military success, but also the spirit of resistance itself are largely undermined if the invader is credited with superiority. Such could not have been the case with the Ethiopians, who could neither be under the spell of the civilizing mission nor acquiesce in any way to the idea of Western superiority. Because their Christianity was, if not older, at least more tried than that of the Europeans, they saw the latter as pampered converts, perhaps suited for condescending treatment, certainly not for reverence. This attitude makes submission all the more intolerable. In any case, it prevented the rush of missionaries and thereby the ideological surrender of Ethiopia. As noted by one scholar, "this complete absence of a spiritual inferiority complex may well have played a significant role in Ethiopia's successful resistance to colonialism."¹¹⁶

Nor was this all. In the context of African traditional beliefs, "each group identifies with its god or gods as the source and mainstay of its identity and power."¹¹⁷ In the eyes of a tribal religion, the advantage of a group over another group easily becomes the effect of the superiority of its supernatural protectors. Accordingly,

its military defeats . . . undermine its metaphysical roots and make it powerless to withstand not only the armed might of the enemy, but also what it easily takes to be the latter's spiritual superiority.¹¹⁸

Insofar as Christianity posits one omnipotent God, defeat cannot be couched in terms of the dethronement of one's god by a more powerful one. Resistance makes sense. Defeat as well as victory are referred to God's justice, which is depicted as a source of hope and confidence. The loss of a battle is a punishment inflicted by God, not the defeat of God. The purpose of such punishment is so that God's mercy can be sought through expiation and still greater resistance. The Ethiopian framework of divine election strengthens these Christian traits all the more, to the point of rendering victory the inevitable lot of God's favorite.

Unity was, of course, the salient contribution of Ethiopian Christianity. This unifying role was due partly to the universalist message of Christianity, and partly to the Ethiopian additions specifying the message. Scholars who have studied the ease with which colonialism conquered Africa have stressed the disunity of Africa as much as the European superiority in firearms. This disunity, generally attributed to the lineage ideology, either hampered the formation of bigger states—which might have been able to muster sufficient fighting forces and resources for effective resistance—or condemned empires and bigger states to be nothing more than a mere collection of small societies, deprived as they were of common ideology, interest, and centralized authority.¹¹⁹ The lack of common identity, and that alone, made the great empires of Mali, Ghana, etc. a mix of exclusive loyalties and, as such, extremely vulnerable to external attacks.¹²⁰

Moreover, a situation of crisis was added to this structural tendency towards dispersion. Léopold S. Senghor said that Africa was colonized because it was colonizable.¹²¹ Paramount among the elements which caused the crisis was the widespread practice of slavery. Africans often evade the fact, yet most of the African slaves who were sent to the American continents were captured and sold by the Africans themselves. This African slave trade was so extensive that it gave rise to real slave-trader states.¹²² On the one hand, this generalized slave-trade "justified" the civilizing mission by arousing European indignation; on the other it created animosity among Africans and a desire for conquest such that it led to "a sort of African partition of Africa, a radical reshaping of political structures and boundaries, taking place throughout the century."¹²³

In this situation of mutual hostility and subjugation, the African opposition to colonialism was utterly impeded. Above all, the organization of popular and united resistance—which would have, if not prevented, at least made the scramble extremely difficult—was unthinkable. Yet there were exceptions, asserting the fact that the greater the unity, the harder the advances of colonialism. Such was the case with some Muslim states: in Mauritania for example, “the struggle became a national war.”¹²⁴ No doubt, Islam provided both the common ideology able to temper lineage commitments and the spirit of popular insurgency through the appeal for the *Jihad*.

No better illustration, however, can be found of the role of ideological unity than in the Maji Maji revolt of Southern Tanzania. It “was a mass movement waged by Africans against German colonial rule in what was then German East Africa”; it lasted almost two years and “involved over twenty differing ethnic groups.”¹²⁵ As to the question why, unlike elsewhere in Africa where uprisings were confined to ethnic borders, so many people united to resist in southern Tanzania, “the answer . . . must be sought mainly in terms of ideology.”¹²⁶ Framed by the prophet Kinjikitile Ngwale of Ngarambe, the ideology had the characteristic of going beyond tribal boundaries, since it taught that

all Africans were one, that they were free men, and that those who partook of the *maji* (water) would be immune from European bullets. The dead ancestors would assist them in a war which had been commanded by God.¹²⁷

Do we not feel some familiarity with the Ethiopian case, even though the ideas of water as a war medicine and the intervention of the ancestors are not quite Ethiopian concepts? For Africans, the ideas of the prophet were new, less by their content than by their universalization. The protection of water was not restricted to one group, but was extended to all Africans regardless of their lineage and particular *cult of ancestors*. Because this unitary ideology cut across ethnic boundaries, the resistance became popular and stubborn, and the Germans had difficulty in crushing it.

All this shows the extent to which the African need to oppose meaningful resistance to colonialism was already present in Ethiopia. The unitary ideology cutting across ethnic groups was provided by the *Kibre Negest* with its two inseparable injunctions: the fanatical adherence to Christianity and the allegiance to the imperial throne. In sum, in view of the political

fragmentation of African societies, the survival of Ethiopia from the scramble is hardly surprising. Ethiopia possessed all that was necessary to stop the scramble, on condition that its resistance be supported by a careful and intelligent policy. The purchase of firearms was not peculiar to Menelik; most African kings had shown the same eagerness. But they either used the firearms to rake in more African slaves or, if employed to build empires, they were unable to endow them with a credible unitary ideology. In the case of Menelik, the existence of a traditional unitary ideology commissioned the firearms to expand and consolidate the empire. So contrived, the empire could effectively withstand colonial invasions in terms of resources and fighting force.

The characteristic weakness of the Maji Maji movement was the magical conception on which the unitary ideology was based. The belief in the supernatural power of water and in the protection of the ancestors saddled the resistance with ideological fetters likely to bring about its demise. Magical beliefs have their root in the conception among Africans of "a universe full of impersonal powers which they could learn to control to their own advantage."¹²⁸ The absolute disadvantage, however, of this type of belief with respect to resistance is its exposure to immediate falsification. As no water can protect from European bullets, the resistance, however wide and intense, was doomed to be short-lived. In lending itself to easy refutation, the belief contained the seeds of its own collapse.

No such danger threatened beliefs based on Christian principles. Their transcendence is beyond the refutation of bullets, or any secular forces for that matter. The opposition is bound to be sustained and difficult to subdue, based as it is more on hope than on the assistance of magic. Better still, conceived as a reward, victory is expected to result from sacrifices. The Christian notion of sacrifice as prerequisite for redemption thinks less in terms of protection against death than in terms of death being a condition of victory. This transfiguration of death guards against refutation, just as it persuades that bullets kill persons, not the ideology. In other words, apart from providing a unitary ideology, Christianity fortified Ethiopia with beliefs that the material superiority of the West could not disprove.

Let it not be forgotten, however, that these aspects of the faith became important because they could rely on the unity of the religious and the political. From this unity ensued both the particularity of Ethiopia and the strength of its ideology. For instance, according to many scholars, the particular weakness of the Oromo *vis-à-vis* the Amhara was their profound

disunity. Though culturally one and expansion-driven, they were not able to overrun northern Ethiopia, owing to their lack of political unity. Likewise, the Islamic threat was greatly reduced by the want of unity among its followers. The only time they succeeded in achieving unity, under the leadership of Gragn, they effectively invaded the Christian empire. After Gragn's defeat, they lapsed into old divisions and ceased to be a serious threat. Cultural unity is not enough, since neither the Oromo nor the Muslims, though lavishly supplied with common identities, were unable to conquer the Christian empire. Only when cultural identity is coupled with political unity does it acquire strength and clear objectives.

Take the case of India. How did it come about that a country as vast and advanced as India was so easily conquered by the British? Simply recall to what extent India "was not yet a unified land."¹²⁹ Besides religious and linguistic differences, there were various powers locked up in small kingdoms and principalities so that the British conquest amounted to the successive annexation of small territories. The conquest of India was not the result of a national defeat; it was a phased incorporation of dispersed powers.

Peculiar to the Ethiopian unity of the religious and the political was the reluctance of the belief to define itself in exclusively spiritual terms. All the followers of Islam as well as of Christianity are united by the universalism of their respective doctrine. The creed, the rituals, the references are universal enough to generate the sense of community. Not so for the Ethiopians, for in this community something essential to their faith would be missing, namely its national character, the fidelity to the sovereign, to the elect. What is fascinating about the *Kibre Negest* is the inclusion of this allegiance in the belief itself, thereby turning it into a religious obligation, into a kind of eleven commandment. As refusal of allegiance becomes a dereliction of religious duty, one can imagine how strong a commitment this overlap between patriotism and religiosity can foster.

Nothing can better explain the protracted resistance to Islam by the greater part of traditional Ethiopia than the power of national religion. For to posit the resistance in terms of military impregnability is necessary but not sufficient. The expansion of Islam, for instance, is due as much to the *Jihad* as to its inner appeal. It would not be fair to explain the spread of Islam by mere conquest; its high religiosity, its consistent monotheism, its social values were at least equally attractive. Why, then, did Islam fail to conquer or even seduce the Ethiopians? What else could explain this de-

iciency of attraction, but that Islam encountered in Ethiopia a national religion, all wrapped up in social and political values? Conversion to Islam was not merely a change of religious creed; it was nothing less than a change of identity. This alone was enough to make Islam unattractive to Ethiopians. The same argument applies also to Catholicism and Protestantism. Neither the theological sophistication of the Jesuits nor the evangelical rationalization of Protestantism impressed the Ethiopians. Both failed lamentably because their attempt to convert involved not so much a theological issue as a change of personality.

Much of the criticism of the Ethiopian Church among missionaries and others may be motivated by the perception that, in cementing Ethiopian unity, the Church was at the same time covering it with a thick carapace impenetrable to Western influence. Far be it from me to say that the Ethiopian Church was beyond criticism. Many of its practices barely squared with strict Christian rules; neither was it open to reforms. But these characteristics are not peculiar to the Ethiopian Church. Nor are they surprising if we take into consideration its long isolation. The notion that the criticism of the Ethiopian Church was inspired more by the intention of dividing and weakening Ethiopia than by pure Christian feelings is not imaginary. All would-be invaders have always found the Ethiopian Church to be the real bulwark of Ethiopian society. Unless this bulwark crumbled, the Ethiopian resistance could not be vanquished. A good illustration of this is Mussolini's open support of Islam: "Muslims were especially favoured" and "great stress was put upon the teaching of Arabic, and so-called 'higher schools of Islamic instructions' were opened at Harar and Jimma."¹³⁰ How convinced the invaders must have been of the role of "the Ethiopian church" as "a centre of national resistance"¹³¹ for them to try to promote Islam against Christianity while they themselves came from a deeply Christian land!

No doubt, the Church has been fairly successful in keeping the country together. It has acted as a center towards which have gravitated for centuries all the regionalist tendencies of the country. According to historians, the expansion of the empire has been uneven throughout its long history. It expanded or shrunk according to circumstances, often related to the vitality of emperors. However, never have the Christianized regions displayed tendencies to break away. Peoples peripheral to the empire have shown this tendency because they were already Islamized. Even today, separatist

tendencies grow from regions with sizeable Islamized populations, further proving, if need be, the unitary role of the Ethiopian Church.

In stressing the role of the Church, we must always keep in mind that its success depended essentially on its merger with the monarchy, which was the other indispensable backbone of Ethiopian unity. Without this fusion, the Ethiopian Church would not have countered the divisive forces. We would have had dispersed Christian communities with little hope for survival. What was remarkable about this monarchy was that, however chronic the problem of succession may have been, it never led to the fragmentation of the country. So endemic were problems of succession in African kingship that theoreticians attribute to them the fragmentation of African societies and the little endurance of dynasties and empires. In all African monarchies, royal succession entailed fratricidal struggles.¹³² Further intensified by the widespread practice of polygamy, the struggles often ended in the dissolution of the monarchical states. A pertinent example of this is the kingdom of Kongo. Any male descendant of a former king being eligible, "each generation, the struggle for succession became more complicated and finally led to the civil war of 1665-66 and the general political collapse."¹³³

Why, then, did the Ethiopian state show such remarkable continuity and endurance while it faced a similar problem of royal succession? Even when the imperial power was at its lowest ebb, it was not contested. Regional lords vied to control it, but no one thought of appropriating it, still less of replacing it by a new dynasty. Not that none of them had the ambition to become emperor, but none was able—without the Church's aid—to fulfill the main condition attached to the throne: the effective unification of the country by achieving ascendancy over regional lords.

Take for example the Era of the Princes. If the Wollo Oromo, who had come to a measure of prominence at that time, did not seize the imperial throne, the cause was less their inability to claim links with the Solomonic dynasty—as some scholars have suggested—than their failure to subdue their contenders. Had such a submission been obtained and the country united under their banner, no doubt they would have easily found Solomonic links. Gilkes notes that

for all their efforts the Yejju chiefs were never able, and indeed would not have dared, to take over the empire. They always acted through an imperial mouthpiece. Not only were they not of the

Solomonic line—though they were married into it at times—but they were tainted with Islam, albeit nominally converted.¹³⁴

The Yeju chiefs could not control the country so long as they were not supported by the Church. They failed to be Solomonic, not by their lineage, since regional lords, including the Yeju chiefs, "were all interrelated either by blood or marriage,"¹³⁵ and that the terms "Galla" and "Amhara" referred more to "religious affiliation"¹³⁶ than to ethnic distinction, Amhara denoting Christian and Galla pagan or Moslem. No, they lacked two Solomonic attributes: the enthusiastic support for Christianity and the ability to obtain the allegiance of rival lords.

A rival becomes emperor only if he emerges as winner from the power struggle. As implied in the *Kibre Negest's* notion of the elect, ascendancy over rivals was the *sine qua non* for accession to the throne. And this ascendancy had one ideological prerequisite: if not the solid backing of the Church, at least its tacit consent. As we have argued above, the Solomonic line signified less lineage or blood than assignment. The submission of contending forces conditioned the anointment because it was the visible manifestation of divine election. And as this submission amounted to the reinstatement of Ethiopian unity, unlike the African kingdoms, this unitary requirement protected the monarchy from the rise of rival dynasties and the nation from political disbandment. No emperor could normally obtain the anointment unless he were ready and able to fulfill the obligation of unifying the Christians under the throne. That is why, as rightly stated by Mathew, "it was principally requisite for the sovereign to be a warrior in a hieratic sense in order to fulfil the perfect attributes of his high state."¹³⁷ From among all his contenders, Tewodros rose to power and became emperor, not because he was ethnically more "Solomonic" than others, but because he united the Christian community by his military prowess. By fulfilling the major requirement for emperorship, he had succeeded where the Yeju chiefs and all his contenders had failed.

All in all, in making military capability and unification work in tandem, the system proved efficient with respect to survival. That no strict rules governed succession to the throne could not but cause instability and strife. Yet, insofar as the problem was solved by the recognition of the victorious emperor, the system was not liable to produce "a succession of *rois fainéants*."¹³⁸ Strict rules of succession are successful neither in avoiding decline and corruption nor in preventing political strife. The advantage of stability is thwarted by the possibility of inept individuals becoming

emperors just because they are heirs. By contrast, the Ethiopian system could not avoid internal conflicts, but it had achieved one positive result: as the one who sat on the throne had passed the ordeal of competition, he was likely to be the best and the most warlike. For a threatened country, such an assurance mattered very much. It is no exaggeration to say that Ethiopia owes its survival to this system of competition which produced emperors capable of gaining the allegiance of regional powers and of successfully defending the country. Emperors were themselves warriors: they led their own army and fought battles; these were not left to their generals. Since warlike virtues, sublimated by Christian service, justified imperial legitimacy, Ethiopia was provided with a leadership able to conduct its defense.

Important too was the equation of Solomonic line more with assignment than with lineage-based dynasty. When problems of succession are such that "lineage" excludes no one from the competition and that the winner receives the recognition of all his contenders, such a power struggle cannot lead to political dispersion. Here also the role of the Church was essential: its interpretation of military might as a sign of divine election made possible the ideological consensus calling for the general recognition of the winner. All this strongly deters the rise of rival dynasties and reveals the secret of the amazing duration of the Solomonic line.

Evidently, succession by direct filiation cannot accommodate rivalries. A vying power must either inaugurate a new dynasty or break up. The plasticity of the Solomonic rule, however, obviated any need to proclaim a new dynasty: each contender could always trace his line back to its original Solomonic links, however vague these may be. Nor was secession necessary, as no specific lineage requirements barred contenders. Thus, each power struggle invariably renewed the unity of the empire and the continuity of the Solomonic dynasty. What caused the breakup of empires was their inability to accommodate the rise of rival powers. The wide interpretation of the Solomonic notion, most of all its emancipation from strict rules of descent, protected Ethiopia from such a danger. The most ambitious and able individuals and families were all eligible. Since the imperial power devolved on the strongest, the net result of this was that only defeat in contest eliminated ambitious persons.

The Ethiopian system of regional rivalry being at the opposite extreme from a modern state, has led many scholars to describe the empire as a collection of smaller states. This interpretation, I repeat, misses the essen-

tial point: the mutual dependence binding the throne and the regional powers. Its mistake is to equate power struggle with the tendency to dispersion. If this struggle has obstructed the establishment of an ordered and centralized system of government, it has nonetheless produced an exceptional ability to defend the nation. Indeed, if the strength of the Ethiopians has always derived from their sheer number, the political organization was conducive to massive mobilization. This, in turn, dictated the very tactics of the Ethiopians, namely the attempt to envelop the enemy. If we ask what made this massive mobilization possible, the answer lies in the role of regional power. The right to raise their own army enabled regional lords to mobilize an appreciable peasant army. This regional army was a threat to emperors, but even more so to invaders who faced an imperial army considerably enlarged by regional contributions.

Because of this massive mobilization, traditional Ethiopia never lost a national war. The defeat of Tewodros by the British was, as we saw, the outcome of his isolation. What do I make of Gragn's victories, especially of the Portuguese expedition to which alone the Ethiopian state owes its survival? Scholars generally overestimate the contribution of the Portuguese expedition. Gragn's advantage was due to the use of firearms and matchlockmen, both provided by the Turks, and the presence of the Portuguese expedition doubtless demystified the new weapon. The attribution to the Portuguese expedition of anything more than this altogether moral support does not stand up to the facts: the Portuguese were few in number; they were also themselves beaten and their leader was killed before they reached the emperor.¹³⁹ A more realistic assessment will recognize in the Portuguese the merit of having ensured a breathing space for the Ethiopians, necessary for reorganization. The death of Gragn precipitated a victory which was inevitable. Indeed, subsequent events will show emperor Gelawdios freeing the empire gradually, that is, through repeated victories.

Where Ethiopia did lose a national war was against Fascist Italy. Haile Selassie had achieved a mass mobilization which proved unable to stop the advance of the Italian army. The material superiority of the Italian army, aided by gas attacks, was so overwhelming that the Ethiopian troops had no other choice than to flee and disperse despite heroic resistance. This picture of united Ethiopia being simply defeated by the material supremacy of the Italians needs serious examination, however. Haile Selassie's excessive reliance on the League of Nations, his personal belief

in the superiority of European armies, his refusal to resort to guerrilla warfare, most of all his divisive policy which caused betrayals and bitter inner conflicts and a lack of preparation on the Ethiopian side (even though informed about the aggressive intention of Italy as far back as 1925) are all factors deserving consideration.¹⁴⁰ Each of these factors, to one degree or another, negatively affected the morale, the organization, and the unity of Ethiopian troops. We must cease to think as though the Ethiopian defeat were inevitable. Even Mussolini neither expected a quick victory nor ruled out a settlement through negotiations.¹⁴¹ Ethiopia may not have repeated Adwa, but it would have resisted better, were its troops provided with able leadership.

In truth, Ethiopia was anything but united. Haile Selassie's rise to power had provoked such deep splits in the political organization, the first centralizing measures had pitched suspicion so high, that regional lords fought the war with mixed feelings. Moreover, Haile Selassie never gained acceptance, as he seized power without the traditional demonstration of his warlike virtues and leadership quality. To assert his power he had to rely more on "Shewan tribalism" than on his own national prominence. Disunity, itself being the first sign of the undermining effect of modernization on Ethiopian traditional values and social setup, better explains, if not his defeat, at least the rapid scattering of his army. More than military inferiority, creeping indecisiveness seized the whole system, wandering as it was through an uncertain, perhaps unsuitable course. Whereas Menelik used firearms while maintaining the traditional system, under Haile Selassie the whole social and political apparatus as well as the values were shaken, without being replaced by a viable alternative. Consequently, a crumbling society with no effective leadership (and hence, little chance of success) was fighting "blind." The defeat was caused less by the supremacy of the Italian army than by the disruptive effects of modernization, which greatly diminished the survival power of Ethiopian society.

The episode of the Fascist victory—which, I repeat, was not a foregone conclusion—must be seen as the first symptom of the inner disease that was to throw the empire, after a long and insidious process of decline, into the turmoil of the revolution of 1974. The remote causes of the disease are easy to discern. Instead of inaugurating a fervent process of modernization, the death of Menelik was followed by an intense but inglorious power struggle. The overthrow of the chosen heir, Lij Iyassu, unleashed a power struggle in which Haile Selassie's methods of intrigue, conspiracy, and

imprisonment of contenders prevailed. It provoked a bloody civil war and paved the way for the practice of nominating as governors Shewan kinsmen in place of traditional rulers. While disorder and discontent were thus growing, Italy was quietly preparing the war. This unorthodox power struggle diluted the unity of the country. Worse, it restrained the state from designing a policy of active modernization and military preparation such as would counter the Italian invasion.

As nothing of the kind happened, Ethiopia had effectively turned its back on its greatest chance for modernization. Precious years were lost in vain internal struggles, and nobody took advantage of the great nationalist fervor created by the Italian threat. A mobilization in the name of survival would have allowed daring reforms and large consensus. By the time Haile Selassie was back from exile and put on the throne by the British, despite the open misgivings of the patriots, Ethiopia had lost its freedom and sovereignty. It had become a link in the world imperialist chain. The faster its incorporation into the imperialist structure, the fewer became the opportunities for modernization. From this time onwards, it will be involved in a policy of duplicity, implanting more and more underdevelopment under the guise of modernization. The story of this deceptive modernization will be discussed later. We have still to unravel the traditional buttresses of Ethiopian survival.

Chapter Three

THE FLUCTUATING HIERARCHY

It goes without saying that a thorough investigation into the reasons for the survival of Ethiopia must probe into the social fabric, obvious as it is that so enduring an existence is hardly imaginable without the support of the material mode of life. To know how the social system reproduces itself is to grasp the mechanism of its survival. In this regard, the immediate problem is the difficulty of conceptualizing the exact nature of the traditional social structure. Conceptualization is likely to have cognitive scope once it arrives at some kind of generalization, if not an outright law-governed acquaintance. This legitimate concern has led most students of Ethiopia to describe the Ethiopian traditional society as feudal. But when concern for generalization ends up in abstract statements which completely leave out certain particulars to the point of distorting the very shape and silencing the pulse of the society in question, confusion replaces the expected enlightenment. Such is the case with the concept of feudalism when it is applied to traditional Ethiopia. A decision on the usefulness—and use—of the concept, after careful weighing of the pros and cons of its proponents and opponents, is therefore imperative.

ON ETHIOPIAN FEUDALISM

Many students of Ethiopia speak of Ethiopian feudalism without the slightest hesitation. Patrick Gilkes, for instance, entitled his book *The Dying Lion: Feudalism and Modernization in Ethiopia*. Peter Schwab freely converses about “feudalism in Ethiopia.”¹ So do John M. Cohen and Dov Weintraub in their book *Land and Peasants in Imperial Ethiopia*. Likewise, Addis Hiwet is convinced of the existence of “feudal ruling classes”²

in Ethiopia. For Richard Pankhurst, "nobles played a major role in the Ethiopian feudal system."³ This view is also shared by George A. Lipsky: "central political power," he writes, "rested upon a feudal nobility which controlled the land and the people who lived on it."⁴ René Lefort's notion of "feudal fabric"⁵ is in the same vein.

Against this school of thought, there is a group of scholars who, conscious of the problematic nature of the social structure, prefer not to use any definite concept or, when they do, add certain qualifications. Still another group frankly rejects the concept of feudalism and proposes a different one. Among the latter we can cite Asafa Jalata who finds the social order "more analogous to a tributary system than to feudalism."⁶

When we examine the arguments of the theoreticians who welcome the concept of feudalism, we see they are particularly sensitive to the practice of land grants. In a manner reminiscent of classical feudalism, imperial grants of land in Ethiopia generated a class of nobles that sustained itself through the appropriation of surplus from peasants working on the land. A detailed account is given by Cohen and Weintraub. They find the concept of Ethiopian feudalism appropriate because the Ethiopian system fulfilled the main criteria of classical feudalism, to wit:

- (1) land which is held in fief, (2) bonds of political dependence between vassal and lord which are personal in nature, (3) monarchical authority which is delegated through intermediaries and is dispersed, (4) secular elites who constitute to some extent a specialized military class, and (5) survival of a weakened state which is the medieval outgrowth of the Aksumite empire.⁷

To all appearances, both in its origination and its structural aspects, the Ethiopian system shaped a society which largely fitted the feudal model that developed in Europe.

Many scholars, however, without denying the validity of some of the aforementioned criteria, have noted the existence in Ethiopian culture of factors bearing no resemblance to feudalism. On the question of origination, a difference is immediately apparent. European feudalism appeared as a result of the disintegration of the Roman empire. Can we say that a similar process took place in Ethiopia? Was Aksum comparable to the Roman empire? Can we even speak of disintegration of the Aksumite empire? And where are the equivalents of the German tribes whose spreading over the Roman empire resulted in the establishment of relations of

vassalage? All our study reiterates the fact that no invasion whatsoever of Ethiopia occurred. Still less has it ever approached anything like disintegration. The decline of the Aksumite kingdom was prolonged by a southern enlargement and by a displacement of the power center, which made the process more one of expansion than of disintegration.

True, as concerns the existence of *fief*—as was the case with European feudalism—in Ethiopia land was held on condition of service, and on land so held the lord exercised full administrative and juridical authority over his subjects as well as the right to collect tribute. Insofar as land was an imperial grant to lords for their military and administrative services, relations of vassalage, analogous to European feudalism, were instituted. But the parallel stops there. In fact, the greater the similarity of the Ethiopian system to feudalism in its early stage, the wider became the discrepancy, as both followed divergent evolutionary lines.

The system of vassalage, at first very strong in feudal Europe, soon began to weaken to the point of becoming merely formal. Through an ineluctable evolution, the nobility succeeded in obtaining inalienable rights that practically cancelled its dependence on monarchs. No such evolution took place in Ethiopia. Perham rightly insists: "though the word feudal is freely used of Ethiopia, there never developed in that country a hereditary caste of nobility able to extort contracts about its powers and rights from its kings."⁸

What about the entrenched regional lords against whom emperors had to battle to assert their authority? This objection actually turns out to be a confirmation: if conflicts there were between nobles and emperors, they only show how far the nobility was from "obtaining inalienable rights." As noted in the previous chapter, the range of its power varied with the strength of emperors. The weaker the imperial power, the larger was the nobility's autonomy and vice versa. That is why the equation of the Ethiopian regional power with the feudal type of devolution of monarchical authority is hazardous. If anything, the Ethiopian system—with the exception of the Era of the Princes—never reached the stage of political dispersion, even if devolution of power was a fact.

According to Anderson, the distinctive feature of European feudalism was "the overall parcellization of sovereignty,"⁹ caused by the existence of "a hereditary aristocracy."¹⁰ The hereditary rights of this aristocracy had greatly attenuated the power of the monarchy. Our previous chapter attributed to the regional power of Ethiopia the power to limit the imperial

authority; but recall in what way the limitation was exercised. It activated ethnic and regional ties because, we insisted, the Ethiopian aristocracy had no hereditary status. Rights were credited to ethnic and regional variables, not to the members of the nobility as such, whose fate depended on imperial appointments and grants. The aristocracy as a class had not attained any autonomy, save by way of representing ethnic and regional interests. Such a representation meant the right of a group, not the hereditary right of the individual noble (who, as an imperial nominee, was interchangeable with any of the numerous potential claimants). All this is to say that the nobility remained dependent on the imperial power, and that the parcellization of power (if such we call the Ethiopian practice) was not structural as in European feudalism. There was devolution of power, but of power which never grew into the hereditary right of the aristocracy.

The essential point is to grasp the cause which prevented the nobility from achieving a hereditary status. Sure enough, the cause is palpable, being due precisely to the lineage-controlled land ownership of Ethiopia. This issue does more than bring us back to the role of the ethnic element in traditional Ethiopia; it points to the essential difference existing between the Ethiopian system and European feudalism, namely the absence of private holdings.

When scholars study the traditional system of land tenure, they come up with two key words: *rist* and *gult*. Some do not even attempt to translate them or to use equivalent foreign words, thereby indicating the extent to which they deal with specifically Ethiopian phenomena. Unfortunately, others make the grave mistake of identifying *gult* with a form of land tenure of a bigger size. To this confusion we owe much of the rambling on Ethiopian feudalism. Following Cohen and Weintraub, we shall say that

rist is the right to claim a share of land based on kinship to a historical ancestor held in common with other *rist* holders . . . Those who can establish kinship through either parent may enter a claim to a share of the land in a unit from elders controlling the allocation of land held by what is in effect a descent corporation.¹¹

The system differs from what is generally known as communal or collective tenures. Thus, it does not imply that the community effectively owns the land. Nor is there any periodical redistribution of land among the members of the community so as to ensure equality of holding. The system is openly unequal and often functions through the principle of direct paren-

tal legacy, bypassing, as it were, the right of the collectivity over land. One reason for this custom is that in theory "the Emperors . . . owned all the land in the country and that it was therefore all held at their will."¹² This theory is not wholly unfounded, since it refers to the imperial practice of land grants. Even the supposition that what has become *rist* was originally an imperial grant, most probably derived from conquest, is not baseless.

Be that as it may, land under *rist* cannot be sold. Based on descent rights, it cannot be expressed in terms of commodity relations, any more than it can be evoked to exclude claimants so long as the kinship tie is established. A characteristic trait of *rist* is therefore security of tenure, to which, of course, peasants are most attached. It

ensures that practically everyone holds land by virtue of membership in the kinship group. Although it promotes fragmentation of holdings, this system has prevented land alienation and the emergence of a landless class.¹³

But neither did it introduce equality of holdings. Allan Hoben explains the perpetual generation of unequal holdings by the methodological distinction between *rist* right and *rist* land. *Rist* right "refers to the right a person has to a share of the land first held by any of his or her ancestors in any line of descent," whereas *rist* land has to do with "a specific field held by virtue of such a recognized right."¹⁴ So posited, a conflict appears between *rist* right, which is unlimited, and *rist* land, which is the actual possession. To quote Hoben, "*a person's rist rights always far exceed his rist land*"¹⁵ so much so that individuals are bound to claim more land than they actually own. The way they corroborate their claims—and most of all, the political means at their disposal to enforce them—largely determine the size of their holdings.

Whatever the size, all *rist* lands are taxable. This turns the *rist* holder into a *gebar*, that is, into a payer of tribute. The ideological root of this obligation apparently refers to the general assumption making land into an imperial grant. What is more natural than holders of *rist* owing tribute to the emperor for the use of land thus granted? The hierarchy does not stop with the emperor, however. It goes beyond him—in fact, to God, who is the real owner of all land. To gain some idea of the devolution of the right to grant land, listen to *Ras Gugs*'s decree of 1800:

The land belongs to God. Man has only its usufruct . . . Who then dares to call himself the owner of something stronger than himself? Holders of fiefs: lords of Provinces, listen: there is no more hereditary suzerainty. God alone has possession always. He gives sovereign right to whom he pleases. He has given it to me . . . I am master of the soil . . . I give rank and investiture. . . .¹⁶

In sum, everybody, including the emperor, is a *gebar*, since, whatever rights individuals have, they owe them to somebody else towards whom they have obligations. The point of convergence of all these obligations is, of course, the emperor as the real lieutenant of God, as the highest official empowered by Him.

The bedrock of the system remains the peasant whose tribute supports the whole hierarchical elite. The tribute, be it noted, was "based upon land, not the person."¹⁷ The land upon which the peasant worked being conceptualized as a grant, it was logically burdened with obligations, the essential part of which was tribute. As such, however heavy and numerous his obligations may be, the *gebar* was neither a serf nor a tenant. He worked for himself and his family. He was not attached to the land either: he was free to seek a new holding elsewhere. Above all, he possessed an inalienable right, namely, his share of land accruing from his kinship ties.

The functioning of the social system geared towards the protection of this right inasmuch as the right fixed the limit beyond which no power, however absolute, could go. Indeed, the attachment of peasants to *rist* deterred the aristocracy from achieving a hereditary status through the private ownership of land. Such an evolution would have meant the transformation of the *gebar* into a tenant or a serf. So attached were peasants to *rist* rights that no power in Ethiopia could think of questioning them without digging its own grave. If the Ethiopian masses have ever pressed on the course of history, it must be through their inflexible fidelity to the *rist* system. Of no small importance was the outcome, since it prevented the rise of a hereditary nobility, which prevention sustained the dependence of the nobility on the imperial power by affixing status and positions more to political appointment than to land ownership.

Conversely, the attachment to the *rist* system infused Ethiopian politics with a strong ethnic coloration if for no other reason than because the reliance of land tenure on descent rights nourished provincialism. Kinship solidarity and the maintenance of parochialism signified the protection of *rist* rights. Insofar as kinship relations determined the right to land, they

were not allowed to lose importance. On the contrary, they had to be kept alive through a cultural identity looking after the preservation of group traits, such as linguistic particularities or local customs and standards.

More than geography or the centrifugal force of the nobility, the *rist* system is the real cause for the preservation of ethnic identities alongside the national consciousness fostered by the Church and the monarchy. The role of ethnicity in limiting the imperial power has thus its real base in the attachment of the peasantry to *rist*. Whatever power the nobility had *vis-à-vis* the emperor, it emanated from the popular basis of *rist*. By activating its kinship ties with the peasantry, the regional nobility appeared as the exacting protector of the land tenure. The provincialism of the nobility, says Markakis, "springs from the peasantry, with whom it maintains close kinship ties through descent group affiliation and the traditional system of landholding."¹⁸ In so doing, however, the nobility was at the same time undermining its chance of becoming a hereditary class of land owner. Indeed, how could it appropriate or destroy its own support? This commitment, in turn, reinstated the imperial authority over the nobility.

Thus, a deeper view of the coexistence between ethnic loyalty and national identity is gained when investigation refers to the *rist* system. The apparent contradiction between these two identities vanishes as soon as their role in the protection of the landholding system is grasped. The *rist* system equally limits the power of the nobility and that of the monarchy. Kinship tenures give power to the nobility against the emperor by involving ethnicity in Ethiopian politics, but impose land rights which rule out the rise of a landed aristocracy. Kinship tenures are therefore the source of the general balance of power suffusing the whole political system.

But whence does the nobility derive its power and status if not from land ownership? For, as members of kinship groups, nobles were themselves *rist* owners. In terms of *rist* rights, however, they had no supremacy over the ordinary peasant. Whatever be the superiority of their holdings, they were due more to their *rist* lands—to their actual possessions—than to their *rist* rights. But if nobles could have more land, was it not because they were able to enforce their claims with means inaccessible to the common peasant? This brings us back to political positions, which were then a prerequisite for larger holdings. So what was the avenue for political positions?

Here we encounter the notion of *gult*. It "entitled its holder to receive from the *rist*-holding peasant the tribute assessed on the land, as well as

labour service and various other perquisites."¹⁹ It is important to note that *gult* is not a holding as such, but the "power to collect tribute."²⁰ The holding itself remains the *rist* on which a tax due is grafted. Tribute being the exclusive right of emperors, *gult* rights are the power accorded by emperors to persons and institutions to collect taxes and to retain all or part of them for their own use. They are essentially imperial grants authorizing state representatives to appropriate tribute from land.

Evidently, the grant of *gult* right was associated with services to the throne. Administrative, juridical, and (most of all) military services entitled persons and institutions to tribute right. *Gult* right, while creating a distinct privileged class, was nevertheless dependent on political functions, and hence on imperial appointments. All the rights of the class were "politically derived rights over land."²¹ This dependence on political functions explains why "the Ethiopian nobility . . . is not a nobility of blood or a hereditary caste."²² And the structural reason for this dependence was the restriction enforced by the *rist* system. As a result, the nobility appeared as a class superimposed by imperial fiat on an otherwise communal structure. So much was this the case that, as we saw, the nobility strove to have some kind of substance by cultivating ethnic ties and identity. True, regional lords could grant *gult* rights, thus constituting their own clients. Still, they were doing this in the name of the emperor, that is by the right transferred to them through the devolution of imperial power.

What do I say about those cases of hereditary *gult* rights known as *rist-gult*? These were situations in which "the grant took on inheritable characteristics by being granted to members of the royal family or high nobility."²³ Revocable only in case of treason and grave misconduct, these grants were *de facto* "an inheritable overright to tribute."²⁴ Similarly, important irrevocable tribute rights were conferred on the Church by emperors. The case of the Church has already been discussed. The purpose of these irrevocable rights, we noted, was to seal the unity of the political and the religious so as to reinforce the national character of the Church. Since the Church enjoyed this right as an institution closely allied to the monarchy, these grants could scarcely be accused of fomenting a force of dispersion.

The case of hereditary *gult* rights conceded to important families does not alter the general scheme. First, such rights become revocable if their holders are indicted for treason. Even though this indictment was liable to various interpretations, it revolved around the central issue of loyalty to the emperor. Second, by hereditary right we should understand no more than

the probability of imperial confirmation. In any case, it did not give the holder the absolute authority to bequeath his *rist-gult* to his chosen heir, as would have been the case with a private holding. As Hoben says,

'hereditary' in this context did not mean that there was a fixed rule of succession. It meant rather that a close kinsman, usually a son, a brother, or a brother's or sister's son, who distinguished himself in the ruler's court, would probably be confirmed in the deceased holder's position.²⁵

The *rist-gult* would remain in the family on condition that a member of the family renews the record of distinguished services to the throne. This is far from being a hereditary holding, even in the remotest sense of the word.

This analysis of land tenure and tribute right indicates the extent to which it is questionable to characterize the Ethiopian system as feudal. The characterization is vitiated on the grounds that a major element of feudalism is missing, namely, the rise of a nobility vested with hereditary rights and the subsequent enserfment of the peasantry. Contrasting the Ethiopian system with European feudalism, Donald Crummey writes:

the two formations differ sharply in that tribute rather than rent strictly conceived was the dominant means whereby wealth was extracted from the Abyssinian peasants . . . the Abyssinian ruling class enjoyed only a modest degree of direct access to land, the principal means of production.²⁶

For that reason, landlordism, which alone could have provided the nobility with a measure of autonomy, was checked. So was the parcellization of power characteristic of European feudalism.

Other differences reinforcing this major disparity have been noted by scholars. Thus, though a hierarchical order controlled the Ethiopian society, "a sharp differentiation of élite versus commoner cultures did *not* develop. . . ." ²⁷ Apart from material distinction due to wealth, such as large houses with many servants, better food and clothing, the Ethiopian nobility did not evolve a distinct mode of life and culture. Essentially derived from the teachings of the Church, its culture was basically similar to that of the peasants, all the more so as this identity was fortified by the need to cultivate ethnic ties. In failing to generate a class culture different from the

peasantry, the nobility was blocking the development of a class consciousness superseding ethnic attachments.

Furthermore, unlike European feudalism—in which parcellization of power encouraged the growth of independent towns, which in turn bolstered the development of a powerful merchant class—no such tendency was observed in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian system was to an alarming degree adamantly opposed to the growth of towns. With the exception of Gonder, emperors and regional lords resorted to “shifting camps,”²⁸ believed necessary to assert their control. Anyway, no town grew as a result of any autonomy afforded by a feudal type of power devolution.

The degree of extreme scholarly laxity in the use of the concept of feudalism to define the Ethiopian society is evinced by the readiness of some scholars to apply it even when they deal with the regime of Haile Selassie. As will be discussed in the last chapters of this book, Haile Selassie's reign had overturned the traditional political organization by installing a highly centralized political rule. Those scholars who admit that parcellization of power was a prominent feature of feudalism should then refrain from using the term to describe the government of Haile Selassie. Doubt was perhaps possible regarding the pre-Haile Selassie system where some form of devolution of power existed. No such doubt is conceivable with Haile Selassie's regime, in view of its tight and all-round centralism.

For instance, let us take the case of Cohen and Weintraub. Their study admits that feudalism implies dispersal of authority and the formation of a specialized military class. It acknowledges the change undergone by the Ethiopian society: the “feudal system has been eroded by the recent centralization of power in the nation state and by the gradual appearance of class based stratification patterns.”²⁹ Even so, they maintain that during Haile Selassie's rule “rural Ethiopia largely remains feudal,”³⁰ because, according to them, the change was superficial and did not affect the traditional structure. To contend that the traditional agrarian pattern was not altered is already a gross oversight, but to maintain that a regime as centralized as the government of Haile Selassie still deserves the name of feudalism is to empty the concept of all delineating traits. Haile Selassie's centralization was so thorough that it completely erased the “feudal” class in its capacity as a specialized military class. Haile Selassie relied entirely on a standing army from which the nobility, as a class, was excluded.

These changes are important for a theoretical approach to look for a more appropriate concept.

Because obvious disparities prevented the Ethiopian traditional system from fitting into the framework of feudalism, some authors have come up with the concept of tributary system. Neither serfdom nor parcellization of sovereignty being inherent in the Ethiopian social organization, of all the concepts, they say, the notion of tributary system comes nearest to defining the reality. The notion emphasizes two essential features of the system. It takes account of the absence of serfdom, for "in tributary system, the ruling class extracted tribute and labor from the farmer who owned the basic means of production."³¹ Indeed, in the *rist* system, the Ethiopian peasants owned the means of production through lineage rights and were not attached to the land. The notion also reflects the dearth of parcellization of power, since "the tributary mode of production usually was based on centralized political order."³² We saw how through appointments and dismissals emperors maintained their control over the nobility despite the repeated attempts of the latter to assert its autonomy.

Should we, then, be content with the concept of tributary system? We would have been so, did not the Ethiopian system retain important specificities despite much resemblance. To begin with, reducing the rights of the Ethiopian nobility to tribute is a big mistake. Apart from being *rist* owners by their lineage rights, thanks to their political influence, nobles "owned land as *rist* in large quantities."³³ *Rist* is no private property, yet the possibility of its enlargement dispels the confinement of the resources of the nobility to tribute collection. Agreed, there is one restriction: we must recall how invariably the accumulation was made temporary, given the right of all claimants of bilateral descents to inherit their kinspersons' *rist*. "A man's death," notes Hoben, "signals the final dissolution of the estate of *rist* land which he has succeeded in bringing together during his lifetime."³⁴

Another point of friction is the political system. The general consensus associates tributary formation with "the centralization of the surplus," itself implying "the real preeminence of the central power."³⁵ Though in Ethiopia the tax rights of the state over land were collected by nominated officials, a centralization similar to tributary societies was never reached. For example, in the Islamic world, the holder of tax right "did not dispense justice, or grant smaller fiefs within his fief, or maintain a private army of his own retainers."³⁶ In Ethiopia grants were not heritable as in the Is-

lamic world, yet a form of devolution of power allowing nobles to exercise greater authority was in place. Remember that the right of the nobles to administer fully the inhabitants of their area, including the right to raise a private army, led many scholars to characterize the Ethiopian social formation as feudal. Accordingly, none of the characters of the tributary mode of production, be it "an indirect, remote means of surplus-extraction, a high degree of internal autonomy of peasant social relations *vis-à-vis* the nobility, or communal forms of landownership"³⁷ fits in with the Ethiopian system. Likewise, granted that the rank of noble was an imperial appointment, nevertheless the nobles so appointed were not alien to the community. They were part of the community with which they had kinship ties. Owing to these factors, we spoke of a balance of power which was midway between centralization and parcellization. If anything, the concept of tributary system cannot grasp such complex relations, for it "implies no specific relations of production *narrowly-construed*, and seems to be of such wide applicability as to approach vacuity."³⁸

What makes this question important is its connection with the survival of Ethiopia. Admittedly, empires were unable to last because centralization gave rise to centrifugal tendencies leading sooner or later to their breakup. In view of the long duration of the Ethiopian state, the supposition that the system had accommodated the need for local autonomy, without threatening the preeminence of the central power, is an inescapable assumption. So is the view establishing between central and regional powers an organic rather than a bureaucratic link. In an organism, each organ has its autonomy while being vitally wedded to the whole and contributing to its being. I see a similar mutual interest binding central and regional powers. Because of its autonomy, the regional power was not a mere instrument of the central power; neither was it self-sufficient, as it had no principle outside the delegation of imperial authority. In thus creating mutual dependence, the system had merged the destiny of central and regional powers. The impulse to mutual integrity, and hence to the survival of Ethiopia, was fathered by this organic connection.

Another—but no less interesting—approach is Greenfield's characterization of the Ethiopian social structure as "a particular brand of African feudalism."³⁹ Presumably, Greenfield is referring to the system of vassalage which existed in Rwanda, Gonda, and northern Nigeria. In the words of Jack Goody, in all these cases, we find the institution of "vassalage associated with the granting of a landed benefit (fief), usually in return for

the performance of military duties."⁴⁰ However similar in many aspects to European feudalism this African system may have been, it departed from it because "African feudalism" functioned with the help of "centralized institutions."⁴¹ According to Goody, the concept of "clientship"⁴² rather than feudalism best accounts for this centralized order. If fiefs holders are clients of kings, they are more dependent on them. This renders the institution of a centralized government quite logical.

Goody explains the establishment of African clientship by the technological backwardness of African. Even though land was plentiful, the population was small and the soil poor. What is more, the ignorance of advanced techniques of agriculture, such as the ox-drawn plough and irrigation, has maintained production at a very low level. So impotent an agriculture could not support a class of lords: neither serfdom nor land ownership could yield any economic advantage. Landlordism thus incapacitated, "chiefship tended to be over people rather than over land."⁴³ From this situation grew African clientship: personal relationships of superiority and subordination, instead of the control of the means of production, instituted social differentiation.

Unfortunately, Goody thinks of finding the confirmation of his thesis in the exceptional case of Ethiopia:

It is highly significant that only in Ethiopia, which had the plough, was there any landlordism in Africa; here in true medieval fashion, estates in land supported a nobility that filled the important offices of state . . . a nobility that was at the same time a leisure class.⁴⁴

This brings us back to what we had previously dismissed, namely the existence of feudalism in Ethiopia. Instead of this conclusion, the question whether the concept of clientship could define the Ethiopian society would have been a better course of thinking. All the more reason for doing so is the good dose of cliental relations diffused in the social system. As Gebru Tareke puts it, "clientalism, which often drew from the affective ties of ethnicity, religion, and region, was the grid of politics, underpinning power relations in the monarchical state."⁴⁵ The concept of clientship is definitely interesting for a number of reasons. It leaves kinship ties room to manoeuvre; it also shows how personal dependence can elevate individuals above the common people. It thus emphasizes the role of authority and the possibility of social mobility. Insofar as vassalage welds the members of

the nobility and the monarchy, its active maintenance can tell a good deal about the survival of Ethiopia.

Sure enough, however, the institution of a centralized government severs the concept of clientship from the Ethiopian system. In a sense, clientship is even less apt to account for the real devolution of power characteristic of the Ethiopian system than the tributary mode of production. Despite their weaknesses, it should be remembered, the advocates of Ethiopian feudalism have still one strong point: in addition to collecting tributes, nobles had lordly rights over their estates, a situation barely possible without a real devolution of power.

Still, the absence of landlordism did not give full vent to this devolution of power, so that the system fell short of fostering genuine feudal features. A good reason for maintaining this course of thinking is the general understanding of the Era of the Princes as a crack in the history of Ethiopia. With the imperial power at its lowest ebb, Ethiopia was about to develop a kind of feudalism. Even then, however, the nobility did not make a move towards changing the *rist* system into something approaching private holding, though we can assume that the nobles must have increased their *rist* share. This shows to what extent the *rist* system had obstructed the rise of a landed aristocracy in Ethiopia. The veracity of this statement is evinced by the ease with which landlordism ripened in the south after Menelik's conquest. The dualist system which established "*overlordship* in the north and *landlordship* in the south"⁴⁶ posits the *rist* system as the main stumbling-block to the rise of a landed nobility. What neither the imperial power nor the nobility had managed to achieve for so many centuries became possible in the south, where a different land tenure prevailed and (most of all) where the status of conquered territory combined with the ethnic distance between the conquerors and the conquered allowed a greater freedom of manoeuvre.

Let there be no misunderstanding. The divergent evolution of the south would not have been possible without the capitalist context. As already indicated, the appearance of private holding and tenancy in the south is inseparable from the penetration of capitalism into Ethiopia, more exactly from the inexorable trend which pushed it into dependency and underdevelopment. We have reason to believe that, left to itself, the conquest would not have introduced anything different from the traditional grant of tax right to the nobility. In this way, it would have reproduced the traditional method of Ethiopian expansion. Tadesse Tamrat suggests that "the land

holdings known as *Rist*, or hereditary estates, in the more ancient parts of the Christian kingdom, were also in origin *Gults*."⁴⁷ Grants of tax right, originally resulting from conquest and expansion, may indeed turn gradually into hereditary holdings as pacification and intermarriages progress. The trouble with this kind of reasoning is that *gult* is a tax right, not a form of land ownership: as such, it presupposes a landholding system on which it is imposed.

What we can suppose, however, is that the institution of *gult* through conquest may well have caused the transformation of communal tenure into a *rist* system. As was the case in Africa, a communal system of land tenure must have originally prevailed in Ethiopia. The imposition of *gult* rights on this communal system must have generated on the part of the conquered a reaction of defense aimed at protecting their traditional right to land. Rather than the vague, indeterminate communal entitlement, a more assertive form of ownership could thus evolve, making communal tenures into kinship tenures or *rist*. Indeed (whereas, in communal tenures, "proprietary rights are not formally instituted and the land in question is held by the occupants to belong in principle to the collectivity as a whole"), in kinship tenures or *rist* "proprietary rights are formally instituted."⁴⁸ Kinship tenures are not content with a general form of collective ownership; they put forward specific claims to land on grounds of no less specific kinship rights, the result of which is, no doubt, a better safeguard against dispossession. Everything appears as though all the land were divided among different family groups, each attaching itself to a given expanse of land that it means to protect by the rights of inheritance.

All this made land taxable by identifying it with specific and fixed owners. It amounted to a structuralization best suited for tax imposition. This individualization of holdings, while offering the advantage of taxability to conquerors, guaranteed at the same time the right to land by positing it as a right of inheritance. All in all, the *rist* system accommodates what is due to conquerors to the traditional land rights of the community. By establishing specific lines of inheritance, the fulfillment of which charges land with tax due to the state, it warrants land right to all.

The entitlement to taxable land accounts directly for the persistence of descent groups in northern Ethiopia. Hoben has remarked that the Amhara descent group, unlike the African descent group, does not enforce cohesion and close ties among its members; still less does it have ritual functions. "It controls land and the rotation of certain minor administrative

offices among its members; it has no other functions,"⁴⁹ says Hoben. In other words, it does no more than warrant the *rist* system, that is, the inalienable access to heritable—therefore taxable—land. Peasant attachment to kinship ties has no other purpose than to preserve the right of inheritance, which then ensures an inalienable access to land. Just as with the nobility, kinship mentality is kept alive in order to protect particular rights. Coexisting with the national consciousness, it deters land from becoming a mere commodity by making its possession dependent on the rights of inheritance, thereby excluding no one from the community. As neither the nobility nor the emperor can overlook this right, the *rist* system suffuses the whole political system with clientelism. In default of private possession of land, rewards for services had to be content with granting tax right, which, however beneficial it may have been to the nobility, was yet saddled with the precariousness of personal appointment.

In this regard, what happened in the south is most instructive. At first, the conquest followed the traditional path of Ethiopian expansion through the grant of tax rights to the conquerors. As Marina and David Ottaway put it,

Emperor Menelik gave those army officers and other supporters who settled in the south the right of taxation in return for administrative services in the conquered territories. Over the years, their administrative duties slowly lapsed, and these settlers began using their delegated tax powers to acquire private property.⁵⁰

So, what the monarchy and the nobility had failed to achieve in the north for many centuries became possible in a short time in the south. The impulse to private acquisition of land (as a result of which peasants lost their traditional right to land) was not countered, as in the north, by the protective system of *rist*.

What thwarted this evolution? According to many scholars, the main reason should be sought in the ethnic disparity between the north and the south, further accentuated by the religious gap. We recognize in this racist view the main argument underpinning the colonial interpretation of the southern conquest. Of course, this racist explanation overlooks that the reduction of peasants to tenants or serfs is the secret desire of any nobility, be it from Amhara, Tigrean, European, or Asiatic origin. Only out of pure mischief can one suggest that the Ethiopian nobility did not long for the same fate to northern peasants.

A serious explanation would rather appeal to the process of modernization. First, the policy of centralization, as applied by Haile Selassie, has aimed at "abolishing *gult* rights" ⁵¹ to the benefit of the state, henceforth conceived of as the exclusive tax-collector. While this measure was necessary to curtail the power of the nobility, it had to assuage its economic needs by allowing private holdings. Second, centralization endowed the central government with resources which were modern and abundant enough to cope with any resistance, wherever it came from. Above all, the formation of a powerful standing army made serious peasant resistance extremely dubious. Third, modern means and products were anything but attuned to the *rist* system. The need for large estates and cash crop production had sounded the death knell of the land right of peasants.

Why, then, was the north rescued by being allowed to retain its *rist* system? Though no doubt peasant rebellions, such as the one in Gojjam, have to a certain extent dissuaded the state from privatizing land by force, sheer consideration of economic opportunities has spared the north the fate of the south. So long as the south supplied the limited but necessary surplus, there was no urgent need for any forcible transformation of the northern rural pattern. Above all, the south was more convenient and rewarding than the north. Large estates and cash crop productions in the north would entail human displacement and social disruption of such magnitude that the cost, including the political risk, would far exceed the inconveniences caused in the south. Disruption was much more reduced in the south because land was plentiful and more adapted to cash crop products, also because the status of conquered land made easier the justification of forcible measures.

The pressure of modernization, then, made possible the rise of landlordism in the south. Needless to say, the north was only temporarily spared: increased penetration of capitalism would have sooner than later entailed the privatization of all land in Ethiopia and, subsequently, the conversion of peasants to tenants without the help of any colonial ideology and practice. The socialist revolution of 1974 prevented the trend by establishing a new land tenure based on the nationalization of all land. This new system guaranteed security of tenure to peasants while imposing on them a tight mechanism of state control.

Be that as it may, the southern unorthodox evolution of Ethiopian expansion shows how far the traditional system was from producing anything resembling feudalism. The intervention of massive and alien mod-

ernization, essentially geared towards underdevelopment and dependency, was needed to produce something approaching landlordism. Its establishment was the first sign of a radical shift of the balance of power in favor of the state and to the detriment of the nobility as well as of the peasantry. More importantly, it was the sign of the progressive slipping of Ethiopia into the worldwide structure of underdevelopment whose spot of solder was, precisely, the unorthodox evolution of the south.

To summarize the position reached thus far, none of the concepts used to define the traditional social setting are satisfactory. The more remote seems to be feudalism, with yet its reminder of the undeniable existence of fiefs. Despite its emphasis on tribute right, the concept of tributary system has no better grasp, compelled as it is to posit a centralized order. So, too, with clientship—which, however, has the unique advantage of throwing light on the centrality of social mobility and on the importance of personalized superior-subordinate relationships. By far the concept of clientship is preferable, provided that it is made to convey forcefully the idea of allotment, of apportionment by which the Ethiopians describe their social position, their relation with God, their expectations—in a word, their relation with the spiritual and material worlds. If the economic and social structure is so conceived as to allow us to see how the mechanism of apportionment functions, then we enter into the hub of the Ethiopian traditional system. Only when we grasp the Ethiopian social structure as a mechanism designed to strew the social scene with unequal shares can we understand all the characters by which we have specified the monarchy, the nobility, their relation to the peasantry, and the ideology.

THE POWER OF AUTARKY

This long discussion on feudalism must yield its fruit, which is, for us, to understand how the system of land tenure ensured the survival of Ethiopia. To be sure, the survival of Ethiopia would not have been possible without the suitability of the socio-economic organization. Granted the strength of ideology, it would not have resisted so long had it not been underpinned by the socio-economic basis. Insofar as the latter controls the reproduction of material life, so inflexible an invulnerability is unthinkable without the intrinsic ability of the mode of the material production to withdraw into itself. To make the independence of Ethiopia rely exclusively on its nationalist ideology or on its warlike values—or even on both—is not to

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give the question the importance and, subsequently, the level of inquiry that it deserves. Such an astounding endurance must have been derived from the way of life of the society itself.

One thing is immediately clear: the *gult* system explains a salient aspect of Ethiopian defense power, namely the ability to raise and mobilize a huge army. We have already indicated that the cherished tactic of the Ethiopian army was to encircle and submerge the enemy. This tactic entailed the reliance of Ethiopia on the advantage of number, and hence on its ability to mobilize rapidly a massive force. This possibility became nullified with the creation of a standing army whose maintenance would exceed the economic potential of the nation. The difficulty would be overcome if recruitment could assume a tentacular aspect.

The *gult* system—that is, the surrender of parts of the state tax to regional leaders and through them to their local followers—did establish a sprawling system of recruitment and mobilization. The grant of *gult* had an outright military objective, both by rewarding military prowess and by instituting a continuous military service. Failing such a service, the grant, we know, was automatically taken away. The more rewarding the military service, the higher became its attraction. In other words, the method promotes a constant competition between vassals at every level, upgrading considerably the defense capacity of the country. Moreover, military competence being the royal road to social mobility, the system of large recruitment through local leaders turns military service into a grass-roots phenomenon prone to attract the most ambitious and able individuals. This is how an Ethiopian scholar explains the military value of tribute right. The meaning, he says, of the governor's tribute right is that

he is authorized to administer all the followers and servants that he is able to muster by stirring up the people of his region . . . Since nobles were vying with each other instead of thinking about their own interests, they were able to organize a huge army. Accordingly, this administration has rendered a great service to the state at that time.⁵²

Another important consequence of the *gebar* system is the continuous expansion and consolidation of the empire. Other than the need to reward military service, through new conquests, the grants of tax right paved the way for the integration of new conquered peoples into the empire. A comparison with the African state system here would be most enlightening.

Admittedly, traditional African states did not generalize the grant of tribute right. Because surplus was scarce owing to the poverty of the soil and technological backwardness, "the sovereign exploited neighboring peoples, not his own subjects."⁵³ This was done by means of war, taking the particular form of frequent raids. This way of obtaining surplus convinced kings of the uselessness of expanding and integrating neighboring peoples. The state of war thus maintained, the state system identified itself with an enterprise of external depredation in search of booty—slaves, cattle, objects of prestige—destined to army chiefs and to the most valorous warriors. Inasmuch as the wealth of kings and elites depended on war and booty, these states were not prompted by expansion. We may even suggest that much of the problem of tribalism which fetters modern African societies is a heritage of this past practice.

The requirement of the Ethiopian system very was different. It was fraught with the need to expand: more *gult* rights signified new conquests, aimed at integrating new peoples into the nation. The Ethiopianization of conquered peoples was embedded in the landholding system, as tributes emanated not from raids but from the administration of people. Expansion and integration of conquered peoples were therefore an inbuilt necessity. The more rapidly new conquered peoples were Ethiopianized, the higher became the economic return.

Essential also was the clear determination of the spirit of this expansion. More than anything else, it needed a settled, agricultural people; hence the urge to institute this mode of life wherever it did not yet exist. What mattered was not so much the land, the expanse as such, but the people working on the land from whom tribute was extracted. The system did not merely encourage agriculture, it hailed it as the main source of surplus to the point of losing interest in other sources. Here is the essential contribution of the *gebar* system to the survival of Ethiopia, to wit, the inception of an economy endowed with the potency of autarky.

Students of Ethiopia have produced interesting analyses of the *gebar* system. All of them have emphasized the pivotal role it played in the Ethiopian society. With respect to assessment, many have praised the protection of peasants against landlessness. But many have also denounced its backwardness, the severe exploitation to which it exposed peasants, and its opposition to private holding. I have not, to my knowledge, encountered a study denoting the *gebar* system's ability to ensure self-sufficiency. This is surprising, especially as scholars insist on the isolation of Ethiopia, on its

withdrawal behind its mountains. Yet the isolation and withdrawal by which the survival is explained would not have been possible unless the economic life allowed them.

Put crudely, Ethiopia would not have survived as a political, social, and cultural entity, had it not develop the *gebar* system. Notably, the system rid the ruling class of the need to look for surplus in trade, especially in long-distance trade. Trade with the outside world was of course practiced, but it never became the major source of surplus to the ruling class. In fact, those Ethiopians who were involved in trade did not belong to the ruling elite, as most traders were Muslims. World history is replete with the rise and fall of countries that relied on trade. Their disappearance or decline is always as rapid as their ascent, nothing being more shaky than wealth based on trade, especially on long-distance trade.

When applied to Ethiopia, in particular to the Aksumite period, this fact acquires its full meaning. Historians testify that the kingdom of Aksum practiced trade on a large scale. Ethiopian products flowed in South Arabia, Egypt, and via Egypt reached Mediterranean countries, while external products came to Ethiopia through the same road. As a result, "a new class of merchants fully committed to the development of direct trade with Egypt" emerged, and "Aksum rose and flourished with a Mediterranean orientation."⁵⁴ Stuart Munro-Hay agrees with this analysis:

The Aksumite state bordered one of the ancient world's great arteries of commerce, the Red Sea, and through its port of Adulis Aksum participated actively in contemporary events. Its links with other countries, whether through military campaigns, trading enterprise, a cultural and ideological exchange, made Aksum part and parcel of the international community of the time.⁵⁵

However, with the rise of Islam, Aksumite kings and elites forwent this prosperity due to commerce, as they "gradually lost their control of the maritime trade."⁵⁶ Two logical possibilities were open to them. Either Aksum would adopt Islam so as to preserve its commercial prosperity, or it would be confined to itself with the certainty of meeting decline and perhaps disintegration. Neither of these possibilities occurred: though a relative decline was observed, the state, Christianity, the social system survived, even expanded southwards.

Therefore, a serious explanation of the preservation of the Aksumite state is needed. How could the Aksumite elite, so accustomed to prosper-

ity based on trade, afford the loss without being undermined? There is only one possible explanation. However important the loss of trade may have been, it was not damaging enough simply because the "economy was . . . based . . . on the exploitation of the Ethiopian highland environment."⁵⁷ The basis of the economy, especially the main source of surplus supporting the elite, was not trade, but the tribute-ridden agricultural production. If trade was an extra income, then the ruling class could afford to lose it, and so resist Islam.

There is more to be said. Aside from acquiescing to the loss of part of its income, the ruling elite has operated an ideological reversal whereby trade became a demeaning activity, only fit for Muslims. Even if we ignore how and when this ideological shift occurred, we know it took place because trade, at first so enthusiastically practiced, came to devolve upon non-Christians. As Pankhurst indicates, trade was "largely dominated by Muslim merchants, and tended to be despised by the majority of the population,"⁵⁸ who, instead, valued war and agriculture.

The ideological change and the agricultural system have in combination brought about the much commented seclusion of Ethiopia following the spread of Islam. The seclusion was possible because the economic self-reliance of the *gebar* system supported the elite by providing the necessary surplus. Let it not be forgotten that, according to many scholars, one of the main reasons for the rapid spread of Islam was the commercial prospects it offered to elites in need of surplus. That Islam came to control the major commercial routes could not but dispose ruling elites to adopt Islam in order to secure their participation in the lucrative trade. The ideologically aloof stand of the Ethiopian ruling elite against Islam explains the survival of Ethiopian Christianity as much as do military successes. Without the *gebar* system which supplied the necessary surplus, whether the Ethiopian elite would have for long resisted the attraction of Islam and its lucrative commerce is highly doubtful.

The collapse of the Christian kingdom of Nubia is illustrative of this analysis. Like Ethiopia, Christian Nubia had displayed Christian resistance to Islam. What is more, much ideological and political resemblance existed between Ethiopia and Nubia. In Nubia, too, the Christian faith in its monophysite version

was adopted to such an extent that it became the state religion, and a symbol of Nubian 'nationality'. The new faith was closely iden-

tified with local ruling institutions, especially that of the kingly office.⁵⁹

How then account for the collapse of a Christian kingdom which had so much in common with Ethiopia? It was not due to military defeat, since Nubia hurled back the Muslim conquerors coming from neighboring Egypt. But where force failed commerce succeeded, for "the spread of Islam was due mainly to the peaceful contacts of merchants and the penetration of Arabs who settled and mixed with Sudanese people."⁶⁰ We can imagine how the growing settlement of Arabs and their mixture with the local population, especially with the Nubian ruling elite, easily divided the society and undermined its defensive capacity. The commercial interests associated with Arab settlers progressively depleted the power of Christianity both in terms of fervor and followers.

A similar evolution did not take place in Ethiopia because the isolation of Ethiopia prevented the flow of Arab settlers and, by the same token, the prominence of trade interests over the self-reliant agriculture. Had the Ethiopian elite been drawn into trade activities, conquest and conversion to Islam would have followed as a matter of course. Due to the provision of the necessary surplus by the *gebar* system, such a course has been averted. Just as matrilineal descent stopped the advance of Islam in central Africa because "the principles of Muslim inheritance" emphasized "patrilineal kinship ties at the expense of matrilineal connexions,"⁶¹ so it would seem that Ethiopia too was fenced into the *gebar* setup. If facts attest to "the early association of long-distance trade and the march of Islam, with the consequent implanting of nuclei of Muslim influence,"⁶² then the *gebar* system has been the great bulwark against Islam.

Let us not hesitate to extend this role of the *gebar* setup to the era of colonial conquest. We have already indicated how in Africa the absence of agricultural surplus created a situation which obliged ruling elites to rely on frequent pillages and long-distance trade. All great African empires were actually based on long-distance trade whose essential items were slaves and precious metals, such as gold and ivory. Dependence on this kind of trade explains their collapse, since the slightest decline in trade activity, whether due to interruption of communication by invasions or to the control of trade routes by contenders or to the exhaustion of mines, was likely to cause an economic suffocation. Despite their apparent strength and expanse, none of the empires withstood colonialism. How could they do so

when dependence on trade had already forced them to concede coastal occupations to European traders? These nuclei of European influence served as a launching pad for invasions as well as for corrupting elites. So undermined were these countries that many of them did not even require conquest. They simply collapsed by the combined effects of slave trade and European erosive influence.

Such was not the situation in Ethiopia. In nineteenth-century Ethiopia, European penetration was allowed only to the extent that it enabled the purchase of firearms. Europeans were welcome, provided they would sell what made them menacing. First with Tewodros, then extensively with Yohannes and Menelik, trade with Europe was sanctioned for the exclusive purpose of purchasing firearms. These were meant to unite Ethiopia by bringing to an end the Era of the Princes, a necessary condition to counter European colonialism. The key to the survival of Ethiopia during the scramble is that commerce with the West was perceived less in terms of profitable gains than in terms of acquiring modern means of defense.

The same reasoning, be it noted, was made in Japan, but with the important difference that Japan was more interested in appropriating Western technology than in merely purchasing firearms. The Ethiopians were after the firearms, the Japanese after the technology. This divergent perception of national defense will be discussed in the last chapters of this book. We simply wanted to suggest that the Ethiopian spirit of isolation, comparable in many ways to that of Japan, was underpinned by the mode of material production. The autarky ensured by the mode of production facilitated the isolation, which isolation shielded the Ethiopian elite from the hazards of trade, from ideological fluctuations, and from external dependence. That the ethos of survival, so characteristic of the Ethiopian mentality, inspired an economic system prone to autarky was only too natural.

THE TWO SIDES OF ETHIOPIAN CLIENTSHIP

Assuming that the reasons for rejecting the concept of feudalism and for accepting the notion of clientship in the strong sense of apportionment are sound, there remains the task of defining concretely the nature of social relationships embedded in Ethiopian clientship. One reason which may mitigate our eagerness to admit fully the notion of clientship is its apparent inability to institute relationships strong and binding enough to wholly ac-

count for the organization of society. Clientship appears as a loose and unstable connection, hardly able to support so enduring and stiff a structure as social fabric. The endeavor to apply it to Ethiopia, whose records of survival were all along extolled, can only sharpen suspicion.

But the view according to which societies with tight and inflexible relations better endure is a moot point. Perhaps the secret of endurance is flexibility, a supposition that our study should confirm. Moreover, if clientship is such that it accords perfectly with the ideological component, then the system is endowed with a consistency protecting it from disruption. With respect to integrity, the harmony between the various forces of social life matters more than their individual strength. When, instead of pulling the social order in different directions, the forces tend to mutual reinforcement, then integrity is best secured. Also, clientship brings out the kind of social relations discussed by most students of Ethiopia while avoiding, more specifically, overcoming their contradictions. Elements which appear disparate and contradictory are harmonized if only we bother to insert them into the structure of clientship.

A little reflection on the traditional society soon encounters the bewildering question of knowing what exactly bound people together in that system. What has been said so far has sufficiently stressed the absence of lineage authority and hierarchy in Ethiopia. Beyond the essentially moral authority of family chiefs and old people in general, no one exercised political, economic, or even religious authority by virtue of seniority in the lineage system.

In default of lineage, could the class structure of the society be the source of authority? That it was a class society is undeniable, but with the caveat that a class of people did not control the means of subsistence. As in other class societies, people were not vitally dependent on those who control the means of production. The *rist* system ensured an autonomy of production which differed markedly from the dependence created by slavery, serfdom, or tenancy. Kinship rights protected land, but did not rule over production.

If the system can be explained neither by kinship order nor by class organization (though no doubt partaking in some of their aspects), no other choice is left than to delve into the notion of clientship. Taking note of the weakness of communal bonds and of rigid stratification, Christopher Clapham, in his attempt to know the force which holds the social system, remarks that a "combination of qualities which hampers commu-

nal activity also forms the basis of a system founded on authority, in which vertical lines of communication largely replace horizontal ones."⁶³ The same observation persuaded Donald Levine of the existence of "*hierarchical individualism*,"⁶⁴ in which people are associated vertically. As most students of Ethiopia agree on the central role of vertical authority, so wide an agreement can be taken as an appropriate qualification. What must be done properly is the structural and logical integration of the elements composing this type of authority.

My preference for the concept of clientship derives from the conviction that it can logically articulate these elements. Essentially, the structure involves self-interest, such as is found in clientelism, but turning into authority because it can either promote or harm self-interest. A hierarchical individualism is a structure in which the domination-subordination relation institutes the reciprocal interest of people. Instead of polarizing the interests of the superior and the subordinate, the hierarchy makes them mutually dependent. Both intend to use their hierarchical connections to further their benefits. They can do so because their relation pertains not so much to material production as to political order. As is the case in fixed-class societies where the superior owns the means of production and the subordinate his labor, they do not combine to make up a relation of production. The *rist* system, I repeat, is an autonomous form of production on which tribute, itself a reward for state service, is grafted. The social hierarchy is thus structured politically rather than economically. Economic privileges are acquired via political positions, and no more by the control of the means of production.

In an economically structured society, the interests of superiors and subordinates are basically distinct, growing eventually into conflictual relations. In a politically structured society, these interests tend to converge, even though they are not on an equal footing. Since political status gives privileges, the interests of individuals depend on the nature of their personal relationships with their superiors as well as their subordinates. The absence of material ownership underpinning authority explains this dependence of status on personal relationships. If status is not the result of material ownership, then personal relationships, especially the authority commanded by each person, account for social positions. The latter derive from personal qualities, better still from personal authority or charisma. The process falls in with the Weberian definition of charismatic authority, charisma signifying

a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a 'leader'.⁶⁵

Relations with subordinates are best understood in terms of patron-client or master-follower relationship than in terms of distinct classes coupled technically for the purpose of production.

The mutual promotion of self-interest is, therefore, what binds the superior and the subordinate. In particular, we will not understand the clientelism pervading the relationship between the *gult* holder and the *gebar* unless we admit that "self-interest . . . primarily attracted and held men to the great nobility who had something to offer."⁶⁶ Even at the level of tax payment, personal relations mattered a lot, as "the quantity paid depends almost entirely upon the landlord."⁶⁷ According to the sort of relation a peasant had with his superior, he could either promote or damage his own interest. When this relation is such that the peasant is ready to offer military service to the lord, he can expect a great deal, including his promotion to a political position. Inversely, the lord is dependent on such military services, be it to retain his own position or to aspire to a higher one. In short, the need to muster fighting forces has woven the system with networks of mutual dependence from top to bottom. This is what Robert Hess remarks:

formerly, in times of war, when Ethiopian society was more mobile, the peasant was rewarded for his military prowess by imperial land grants. The ideal of Amhara-Tigre peasantry even today is that of the highly individualistic warrior-farmer.⁶⁸

Levine is even more specific:

the *dyadic* tie of the patron-client relationship is the fundamental type of relational bond of the Amhara social system. The essential ingredients of such bonds are the needs of a client and the present or prospective capacity of a potential patron to fulfill them. A man's power in this system is based on the number of persons who are dependent on him, whom he can mobilize in time of need on the basis of favors granted or promised.⁶⁹

Now is the time to put in order the often disparate observations made on Ethiopian society. No sooner have scholars agreed on the hierarchical character of the society than they hasten to stress its individualistic trend. They speak of extreme deference to authority, but also of disposition to defiance, even disloyalty as soon as the leader encounters setbacks. "Political loyalties were ultimately instrumental—designed to achieve something, not valued in themselves,"⁷⁰ says Clapham. Indeed, so authoritarian a society would not have developed at the same time these incompatible traits, were not authority itself instrumental in acquiring social and material gains. Where no such gains are perceptible, the impact of authority dies down. However, this does not mean that respect for authority was artificial or seeming. On the contrary, in being intertwined with personal ambition, it called for total identification with and submission to the authoritative figure. These same characters, however, exposed it to being dispelled or demystified by the leader's misfortunes, which, so to speak, broke the spell.

The proverbial "Ethiopian suspicion"⁷¹ is also a trait which conflicts with the notion of hierarchical society. If anything, trustworthy relations should pervade the patron-client connection. Not so, as power at every level remained an object of constant competition and thus invited contenders. Power was retained only insofar as the holder was able to justify it by successful achievements. As noted by Clapham, "a leader can make himself obeyed only so long as he is successful, and no Ethiopian can be sure of retaining his followers when he falls on evil days."⁷² Failures, especially military setbacks, herald the imminent social and political decline of the leader, whetting even more ambitious rivals. Because "even a nobleman must prove his capacity for leadership in order to achieve this status,"⁷³ persons in position of power never forget that they are surrounded by rivals who can oust them, provided they have the necessary ability. The net result of all this is that everybody is placed under a "tough man's system"⁷⁴ which compels superiors to constantly prove their ability, while inciting their followers to strive after the leader's position. The more leaders are successful, the higher is their authority over their followers from whom they can ask great sacrifices, whereas the more their charisma is declining, the lower becomes their control over them.

This conflictual relation suffused the whole system from top to bottom, the top being the power struggle uniting and opposing the emperor and his most important regional leaders. Feelings associating loyalty, defer-

ence, and admiration with the spirit of rivalry permeated the whole hierarchical structure. Scholars attribute the Ethiopian propensity to secretiveness, intrigue, and suspicion to the constraint of this duality of authority. Clapham goes so far as to suggest that this duality of authority is responsible for the

considerable difficulty in building institutions, in the sense of regularised ways of doing things which were in large part independent of the personal loyalties and inclinations of the individuals involved in them, and which would therefore allow a dispersal and delegation of power.⁷⁵

Pertinent as this observation is, it applies more to Haile Selassie's regime than to the traditional system, which was decentralized. The absence of institutionalization should be ascribed to value requirement, less so to internal deficiency.

The frequency of litigations is another illustration of the competitive character of the social relations. Mostly related to the question of land inheritance, litigation was so frequent and general that it was hardly possible to find a person, however highly placed, who was not involved in legal wrangles with kinspersons. Plowden has given an eyewitness account:

Justice is administrated by all the chiefs and subordinate governors. Appeals from these, who are ordinarily rapacious, are frequent, and it is not an uninteresting sight to witness the Ras's court filled with suitors of all classes; the multitude seated on the grass, no one excluded, and the highest noble, the meanest peasant, standing, pleading on equal terms before his judges or himself, and with entire liberty of speech.⁷⁶

The possibility of conflict over land appears at first glance incomprehensible. Being based on descent rights, the *rist* system should normally avoid disputes by ensuring a fair distribution of land and by enforcing the solidarity of the group. But, as we saw, the *rist* system only warranted a security of tenure for each person, the size of which was largely indeterminate. As people could claim land through various descent lines, instead of activating the solidarity of the members of the group, the *rist* system created "a chaotic competition of individuals and mutually exclusive claims on land."⁷⁷

The conflict with which the *rist* system was fraught induced a scholar like Levine to state that "the Amhara have virtually no sense of 'community' at all."⁷⁸ The statement is pitched a bit high. While the level of cooperation between members of a descent group was indeed very low, the very maintenance of the *rist* system, however numerous its conflicts, indicated a remarkable sense of community. After all, the *rist* system is a perpetual reminder of the lineage ties thanks to which individuals have a share of land as their inalienable and essential right. The fact that the system never gave way to private holdings is enough to temper excessive judgements on the individualism of the Ethiopians. Moreover, besides competition, there are diverse forms of association and mutual assistance. Of such are the associations known as *edir*, *meredaja mahber*, and *ikoub*, which—on the basis of either neighborhood, or ethnic closeness, or professional solidarity—seek to further common goals and mutual assistance. These associations are not compulsory, and their importance must not be exaggerated. Nevertheless, their existence should moderate all exorbitant judgement on Ethiopian individualism.

The truth is probably this: while vertical relationships have undoubtedly the upper hand as concerns instances related to the possibility of social mobility and to increasing one's possessions, horizontal, communal connections are activated where matters of common interests are at stake, the most important being *rist* rights. These factors must not be neglected, for a society based on clientship cannot wholly adhere to an unbridled individualism. Clientelism itself makes room for kinship ties and solidarity, as evinced by the persistence of ethnic sentiments alongside the national consciousness. The tendency of the system to give itself over to nepotism must not be hushed up either. Without the numerous ties harnessing individualism to communal interests, many aspects of Ethiopian life would have no meaning.

However, it must be admitted that the Ethiopians are inclined to give priority to vertical ties as soon as they judge these ties useful for social mobility. The frequency of litigations indicates less the absence of horizontal solidarity than the prominence of social mobility. What is more, social mobility did not end up in individualistic seclusion and glory. It was used to swell communal obligations, particularly by the multiplication of dependents and followers. Nothing was more alien to Ethiopian mentality than the type of individualism which accumulates wealth to promote individual projects. Such was the spirit of clientelism that the search for wealth and

higher status aimed essentially at increasing one's dependents, not one's capital and wealth. The purpose of wealth accumulation was its dispersion. Far from encouraging the rise of the hoarding individual, the system has suppressed it by hailing prodigality (*legasnet*) as the cardinal value of lordism.

A good illustration of this was the widespread practice of *gibre*. Emperors, the great regional lords, and members of the nobility felt obliged to organize regularly huge and wasteful feasts to their numerous followers. As *gibre* means tribute, there is good reason to believe that these feasts were conceived as a social obligation, as what lords owed to the followers.⁷⁹ The regular organization of *gibre* was for lords a public demonstration of their willingness to share their wealth with their followers. Failure to comply with this obligation greatly decreased their ability to retain the loyalty of their followers. Nor was this all. The obligation to share applied to grants of *gult* as well. Never were imperial grants meant to be the exclusive right of direct recipients. Following the imperial example, the latter had to give "parts of their area to their vassals" in order "to maintain a train of personal followers."⁸⁰

Only when placed in this context of reciprocal dependence can the true nature of individualism and social mobility appear. None procured individual autarky; rather, the higher the social status, the larger was its network of dependence. So while it is just to underline the place of competition, suspicion, secretiveness in Ethiopian mode of life, to state that the "Amhara society does not envelop the individual in a complex network of obligations and constraints"⁸¹ is to go astray. Obviously, this statement contains a good deal of Western individualism projected on the Ethiopian society. In reality, social status was burdened with obligations which were such that, except for their political influence, the rise and continuity of wealthy families and individuals were handicapped.

Anyway, knowing the importance of clientelism, there is a need to keep the balance between conflictual tendency and mutual dependence. Just as dependence is filled with sentiments of mutual interest, loyalty, gratitude, and indebtedness, so aggressiveness pervades competitive relations. Likewise, knowing the great sacrifices and isolation that Ethiopia has paid just to remain loyal to Christianity, the place allotted to the calculating individual must be severely attenuated. The survival of Ethiopia denotes a high degree of abnegation and commitment up to which few peoples in the world have raised themselves.

We thus arrive at an essential point, to wit, the attribution of the survival of Ethiopia to the fighting spirit of the Ethiopians. There is a general consensus on this point: the warlike values and spirit of the Ethiopians are widely recognized and admired. Yet little is the attempt to understand the source of this fighting spirit. With some intelligence, Clapham has tried to harness it to authoritarianism. "When the bond of authority is snapped," he remarks, "anarchy results."⁸² He adds: "an Ethiopian army often falls apart and flees the battlefield once its leader is dead."⁸³ Such a misfortune happened to Yohannes who, although victorious in his battle against the Dervishes, watched the disintegration of his army once he was mortally wounded. Clapham is prevented from developing further his insight by the alleged individualism of the society, making loyalty contingent on self-interest, as though the Ethiopian army were composed of hired mercenaries. The long survival of Ethiopia on the one hand, and the recognized combative spirit of the Ethiopians on the other, militate against this kind of approach.

The original attempt of Clapham to associate the fighting vigor with authority should have read into mutual dependence the very source, the crucible of the Ethiopian bellicose spirit. The warlike temper and the courage are tightened by the rope fastening the leader and the follower. The tighter the bond, the higher is the combative mood. So long as the binding is strong, there is no wavering, still less retreat. Unsurprisingly, the death or retreat of the leader entails a significant decrease of the combative will: the pressure identifying leaders and followers, and which is made of a complex feeling of vanity, personal ambition, commitment, and fear of shame, is suddenly deflated. Thanks to this pressure, all were at once actors and judges on the watch: what happened to leaders happened also to followers. Any contrary act to the fighting spirit fractured immediately the bonds, just as any enhancing act reinforced them. Courage was inflamed because the bonds of authority activated commitment. So justified, authority could demand anything: it acted as a spell forcing abnegation. In turn, the abnegation of followers renewed the authority of leaders and ignited their daring spirit. War was no less the possibility of victory than the test of social bonds and the power of authority.

This was so true that, according to an Ethiopian author who participated in the battle of Machew, one of the reasons for the defeat of the Ethiopian army was the use of airplanes by the Italian army: they had the characteristic effect of disrupting the bonds between leaders and follow-

ers. This new weapon of war in combination with the use of gas obliged each participant to seek shelter in disorder. Its disastrous effect was the shattering of the bonds knitting together leaders and followers and the consequent decline of the fighting spirit. Thanks to the patron-client relationship, our Ethiopian author explains, the leader provided his follower with all he could for his means of existence and enjoyment, thereby developing between them a relationship which is such that "without fear of death and with audacity, they used to join in fighting battles and won victories."⁸⁴ However,

in the last battle of Machew, because of the danger of airplanes, patrons and clients, masters and servants, contrary to previous tradition, had to go to battle separately, without even meeting again . . . Since the master was without his servant and the servant without his master, other than looking for shelter, can we say that they really fought? Moreover, can we maintain that servants fought when there were no masters to watch them? It would not be presumptuous to conclude that, in this condition, everybody was concerned with saving his life rather than fighting and defeating the enemy.⁸⁵

Aerial bombardments and gas created a condition of dispersion which forced each combatant to save his life in default of being able to prove his merit. The missing element was the social bonds, the social eye whose surveillance and judgement normally coerced everybody, under pain of losing all consideration and status, into showing courage and going forward.

What is one to conclude from this? That one of the reasons for the survival of Ethiopia, namely the fighting spirit, was born of a social system which bluntly associated position and wealth with warlike successes. In making warlike values the royal road to social mobility, the society secured a leadership hardened to war, which turned into a vocation liable to attract the most able individuals. A consensus was thus reached: the social position of a person was determined neither by birth nor by fate, but by his/her military valor. This bellicose mentality was even more enhanced by the crucial place of authority, which could demand great sacrifices provided it is itself daring enough.

But, one may object, is not the system precarious insofar as the fighting spirit was conditional on the bonds between leaders and followers, that is, finally, on the quality of the leadership? Does it not greatly reduce the role

of popular force and resistance, which may prove more solid and extensive? Let it not be forgotten, however, that for communal resistance the slightest reversal very often entails a general collapse and submission. It may be impressive, but it is not flexible enough. Though the Ethiopian resistance is also massive, yet it relies on individual ambition and on the call of the hero. Because of this, it creates a mystical link between leaders and followers, which link, I repeat, contradicts the view on the vacillating nature of Ethiopian loyalty. This view ignores the origin of the fighting spirit of the Ethiopians, notably the impact of authority. Either authority is decisive enough to command full loyalty or it is liable to conditionality, and in that case it should not be given a cardinal place. I see no better way to convey the mystical power of authority than to repeat Perham's quotation of an English witness:

The Ethiopian system was not a feudal system: it was a tough-man system . . . There was one order to which all Ethiopians responded at once; that of the *tillik saw*, the great man. He inflicted often the most terrible punishments; he commanded his followers to face the most fearful risks; he fed them on the most astounding amount of bullocks and mead. His word, his whips, his generosity, the unquestioned objects of his intrigue, were the sole law for them . . . The people obeyed him. That was the basis of Ethiopian defense.⁸⁶

Moreover, the system was endowed with the power of indefinite revival. For heroes are not rare; they appeal and convince, and the resistance starts anew. A final defeat does not exist; there are only setbacks of individuals. More daring and fortunate individuals can easily revive the combat. A case in point is the Ethiopian resistance to the Italian occupation. Haile Selassie's defeat was so total that, as happened elsewhere, the nation *should* have submitted. But very soon uprising started, increasingly expanding as more daring and successful leaders emerged. As Anthony Mockler explains,

what had at first been put down to the isolated activities of *shiftas* could no longer be minimized. By the end of the rains the former provinces of Gojjam and Beghemder, the new governate of Amhara, so easily conquered and so peacefully held, were aflame with revolt.⁸⁷

Mockler adds that "the rebellion began spontaneously, in local uprisings and under local leaders whose names were almost unknown outside their immediate areas of influence."⁸⁸ The call of the hero alone can so rapidly change the resounding victory of the Italians into a garrisoned occupation. As the resistance was organized around proven leaders, such as Abebe Aregay, Geressu Duki, and many more, the mystique, the charisma of the hero largely accounts for the rapidity and scale of the uprising.

THE SOURCES OF SOCIAL MOBILITY

By now is evident our attempt to define the nature of the social system in relation to the centrality of social mobility. In particular, our refusal to accept the notion of feudalism was primarily motivated by the need to accommodate social mobility, since the rigid class distinction of feudalism would be adamant on the issue of mobility. We preferred the concept of clientship because, while guaranteeing the existence of classes, it refrained from positing fixed demarcations, thus allowing upward and downward movements.

What favored these movements was the absence of a hereditary nobility. This does not mean that some families, especially regional lords, had no stable power base. They had, but their power was not transmitted in a hereditary fashion. The consent and express appointment of the emperor were always necessary. The right of the emperor to nominate his own favorite from among the numerous claimants in the same or rival family was a power against which the nobility remained defenseless. Likewise, these same families were never immune from decline inasmuch as the system permitted the rise of new persons if only they were good enough to muster sufficient support through personal merits.

Even though most scholars agree on the existence of social mobility, they differ markedly in the appreciation of its importance. Some think that it was deep-going, others incidental.⁸⁹ Here a clarification is necessary. Since most studies of the traditional social fabric were done during and after Haile Selassie's reign, many authors have been influenced by what they saw and read at that time. Yet Haile Selassie's regime had significantly drifted away from the traditional system of which it preserved only some minor aspects. Especially in terms of class fixation, the regime had gone to the extent of inducing a real social blockage, still more aggravated by the systematic promotion of Shewan tribespersons.

An authoritative voice against social mobility is heard from the celebrated novel, *Fikre Iske Mekaber* (*Love Unto Grave*). The novel relates the misfortunes of a young man, Bezabeh, who falls in love with Seble, a young girl of noble birth. Her father, by the name of *Fitewari Meshesha*, is so opposed to the idea of marriage that his stubbornness will precipitate his own family into disaster. The way *Fitewari Meshesha* justifies his refusal to marry his daughter to a commoner seems to suggest that rigid class distinctions existed in Ethiopia. The candidate for marriage must be of aristocratic origin and, according to him, this excludes all commoners, whatever their individual merits. Even those persons who now claim to be nobles, the *Fitewari* maintains, have become so by selling grain, cotton, butter, or skin, or by bribery.⁹⁰ "The time," he adds, "in which men were chosen by the merit of their breed and shield is long gone: people like me find ourselves amidst farmers and oxen."⁹¹

What if rather than describing the traditional society, the novel was actually relating the kind of degeneration the Ethiopian society were undergoing from the effects of an ill-gotten modernization? If yes, one possible outcome may well be the stiffening of upper classes under threat of modernization. *Fitewari Meshesha* would thus be "a symbol of the dying feudalism."⁹² Unable to adapt himself to the change, he reacts in a defensive manner by withdrawing into himself. Such a reaction can only be suicidal, as it further alienates his class from the society, causing its eventual downfall.

Let it be emphasized that *Fitewari Meshesha* cannot particularly tolerate the rising aristocracy of money, which made its fortune through trade rather than through the *gult* system. These people do not exhibit the values to which he is most attached, namely the values of war. Hence his inability to understand how such people could rise to positions of power without undergoing the test of martial fitness. In other words, he is opposed not so much to social advancement as to the way it is done, to the canons presiding over the selection. Small wonder he tries to safeguard the warlike values by refusing the marriage. This refusal is for him a defense of the dethroned values of traditional Ethiopia. The novel relates therefore more the hardening of the aristocracy threatened by modernization than the nature of the traditional Ethiopian society. It is the description of a dying society, and (as such) prone to tragic denouements.

On the other hand, many studies of the traditional society hint at the precarious condition of the nobility rather than at the rigidity of the social

system. Unable to achieve a hereditary status, the nobility was in need of constantly defending its position, just as it was obliged to accept rising outsiders and falling members. The social basis was so mobile that "the attributes of rank, privileges, honors, and duties were in constant flux,"⁹³ and thus inclined to recast the destiny of individuals in all classes.

Lest we fail to understand the essential attributes of the traditional society, the importance of social mobility must be clearly recognized. Grant survival as the major ethos of Ethiopia, still more the centrality of war and warlike values, and the periodic recasts of the destiny of individuals and important families on account of war cannot be brushed aside. Surely, victory or defeat, prowess or failure had to bring about the rise and fall of individuals and families. If war and martial values were important, so was social mobility. Pankhurst gives a taste of the situation when he writes:

Conflicts of one kind or another were, however, so common that every year many warriors spent most of the year making war. Such a multitude of people were involved that Almeida wrote of the Ethiopians that: 'In war they are reared as children, in war, they grow old, for the life of all who are not farmers is war'.⁹⁴

So endemic was war that foreign observers did not hesitate to single out war as "the principal cause of its [Ethiopia] poverty and barbarism."⁹⁵

The conclusion that the Ethiopians are by nature warmongers would, however, be wrong. It is better to say that military life "held out hopes of loot and advancement"⁹⁶ so that the association of military life with social promotion is always kept in mind. In this way, the possibility of understanding the survival of Ethiopia by this dependence of social mobility on one's war record will come out clearly. Put differently, while individuals were pursuing their private ambitions, they were at the same time working for the survival of Ethiopia. Being a soldier, joining the army was not merely a job; nor was it simply serving a master. It was a way of pursuing individual ambition: the intention was not to remain a soldier, but to rise in the hierarchy. The battlefield rather than bloodline was the crucible of the elite. One's bloodline may be a major factor, but one nurtured on warlike values such as would point to a cultural requirement rather than a descent right.

In the absence of a fixed stratification, how then account for the relative stability of the society? The coupling of status and wealth with military service and deeds meant that *gult* rights were removed from the appointees

whose services were fading. This alone was sufficient to incite many of them to maintain the required standard of service as well as to stir up new candidates. Thus, the relative stability of the system was due less to the immobility of higher places than to the nature of the required qualities which was such that few people could fulfill them. The higher the status, the greater were the military obligations. This "tough-man" system, as it has been called, necessarily imposed a severe selection. Even small fluctuations were highly significant in the social ecology.

How tight but significant the social selection was is shown by the possibility that "any person, including a slave, could ascend the social ladder through acts of military valor or royal patronage."⁹⁷ Examples abound of people of humble origin who rose to high positions of power, even to the highest. We have already indicated the vagueness of the concept of Solomonic dynasty. People who, like Tewodros and Yohannes, could not by any means claim close links with the Solomonic lineage became emperors essentially by their leadership and military accomplishments. To remain in recent history, there is also "the remarkable career of a son of a peasant,"⁹⁸ Alula, who became *ras* and governor of Hamasen and Saray by his military valor, especially his victory over the Italians at Dogali, and under Menelik governor of the areas north of the Weri River including Adwa and Aksum. No less famous is the career of *Dejazmatch* Balcha Abanefso as well as that of *Fitewrari* Habte Giorgis: both rose to powerful positions under Menelik and after, though they were originally slaves taken as prisoners of war. The case of *Ras* Gobena is another example: initially an Oromo chief, he reached the pinnacle of power by his outstanding contribution to the conquest of the south. In spite of its degenerate form, the rise of Mengistu Haile Mariam, who at first was unknown and largely handicapped by his humble origin, followed the logic of the system. He was ousted by guerrilla fighters whose origins were no less humble.

The rise through military valor was not limited to services done for established authorities. "Banditry and rebellion" were also "vehicles for social mobility."⁹⁹ Ambitious individuals who were dissatisfied with their place in the society could claim their rights through this form of protest. The nature and extent of their rebellion were perceived by the society as a way of advertising their ambition and merit. Their intention was not the destruction of the social order but their own integration into the society according to what they believed to be their rightful place. This form of protest was rampant, yet it "never threatened the Ethiopian social sys-

tem"¹⁰⁰ for the simple reason that the society understood the message and was ready to accommodate the rebels.

Social mobility was encouraged as much by the fragility of social stratification as by the absence of kinship ideology. Unlike traditional African societies, the place of individualism in Ethiopia could not but mitigate kinship ideology. Particularly, the depletion of seniority of any intrinsic power differentiated the African system from the Ethiopian society. In the African system, the more senior the person, the stronger is his vital force, and the higher should be his social authority and power. The whole idea behind the cult of ancestors is drawn from the belief in the control of more vital forces by ancestors than by the living, and among the living, by those who are close to ancestors by virtue of their age. A scholar writes:

In addition to different categories of forces, Africans maintain that these forces follow a hierarchical order such that God supersedes the spirits, founding-fathers and the living-dead, according to the order of primogeniture and then the living according to their rank in terms of seniority.¹⁰¹

It leaps to the eye that this descent hierarchy has little place for social mobility. The natural hierarchy according to seniority has no concern about individual ambition and striving, inclined as it is to consider them as an expression of defiance. In truth, social advancement makes no sense, as no one can hope to hold a position of power outside his/her age-group.

Because neither rigid hereditary class distinction in the European sense nor responsibilities spread out according to seniority in the African sense controlled entitlement to positions of power in social life, the Ethiopian social order was naturally favorable to mobility. Except for the standard of military fitness and the grace of patronage, there was no fixed order that one had to follow to rise to higher positions. To be sure, persons already well placed were doing all they could to obstruct the rise of outsiders. In this connection, stories and proverbs emphasizing the intolerance of rivalry on the part of superiors as well as their jealousy (*miḳegninet*) were commonplace, just as were accusations of actual obstruction in the everyday life of most Ethiopians. If anything, this proves to what extent advancement was a social pressure. In point of fact, lessons were gathered from the misfortunes of jealous lords: for instance, how the loss of valuable persons, especially their shift to the service of a more generous lord, pre-saged the decline of the former.

The bilateral nature of the Ethiopian descent system also favored mobility. "Since descent was reckoned bilaterally through both parents, almost any commoner could trace a relationship to local nobles,"¹⁰² says Donham. The possibility of tracing this kind of connection was important because it was liable to activate patronage. Once the connection with a person in power was established, the Ethiopian had only to show some merit to give full rein to kinship clientelism. Inversely, persons in power were ready to extend their protection in order to strengthen their own local power base.

In fact, the bilateral system was most propitious for building a local power base. As it multiplied litigations over *rist* rights, individuals could hope to increase their landholding provided they held political positions, necessary to enforce their claims in courts. In thus extending their *rist* holdings, they increased their economic power, which in turn, enabled them to sustain more followers. All this had a snowball effect, launching them into an ascending course. The ascension was all the more facilitated as the upper classes never developed a distinct culture. Neither different languages and customs, nor more refined philosophical views or aesthetic norms were there to hinder the process of assimilation.

Equally important to the promotion of social mobility was regionalism. The decentralization and localism of regionalism created a wide, almost grass-roots level of recruitment. Need we emphasize that in reducing all avenues to the view of the center, centralization severely narrows social advancement? The magnetism of social mobility cannot go without some attachment to localism. Perceived as a way of opening large avenues to social elevation, regionalism could not but seduce the Ethiopians. In addition to creating wider opportunities, it supported the ascent of leaders from the local soil. Anyway, patron-client relationships required such a nearness that they could hardly work outside a decentralized system. This is an additional proof against the reduction of regionalism to mere parochialism. Decentralization was actually the carrier of the major value of the Ethiopian society, that is social mobility.

All this confirms Donham's idea of contrasting the Ethiopian conception of society with the European notion. He writes:

The European idea of society as composed of functionally interdependent layers of fundamentally different kinds of persons--those who prayed, those who fought, those who worked--was absent from Abyssinia. Rather, all men were thought to be basically the same,

even if chance and personal destiny had rendered them temporarily unequal.¹⁰³

A clarification is needed. The African age-group system did not institute any fixed discrimination between individuals, either. Though the Ethiopian system shared this African trait, yet it had tarnished it by erecting class distinctions. Something like a synthesis of European fixed distinctions and African communalism was thus reached: class distinctions were erected, but on a fluctuating basis.

The ultimate meaning of Ethiopian social mobility can no longer escape us. Together with the Orthodox religion and the monarchy, it worked towards the consolidation of the Ethiopian society by providing it with a consensus line. Such is the law, the consensus says, of the "tough-man system" that, while all Ethiopians are equal, perforce some occupy higher positions than others. The Ethiopians will not accept that birth, age, or any other natural attribute prevents social rise and decides their fate. In return, they are willing to admit their individual position in the hierarchy, provided it is the outcome of the "tough-man system," such as we have defined it. As stated by Donham, "if domination itself was relatively unconcealed, there is good reason to think that commitment to social mobility was the central myth of Abyssinian society."¹⁰⁴ The ordeal, the test of social mobility alone justified power and authority. Rebellions and betrayals started when those who were placed in higher positions either blocked the mobility or exercised a leadership impeding opportunities. In either case, they placed authority beyond contest, as though it were innate or immovable.

By the way, social mobility corrects the contradictory views held by scholars on the nature of authority in Ethiopia. They are right when they insist on the cardinal place of authority and on its unlimited nature. Yet they also accord a central place to individualism and self-interest, turning loyalty into a calculated attitude. So conceived, authority and individualism repel each other if only because authority cannot have a grip on some such individualism. But consider authority and individualism as the two sides of social mobility, and you will avoid the error of speaking of them as though they were separate demeanors. Their contradiction would vanish were individualism growing from authority. This is possible if individualism is a reward by authority, if it hatches out under its patronage. Individualism is not related to authority in terms of give-and-take inasmuch as it cannot define itself outside authority. Service comes first, so that the

relationship between the superior and the subordinate is individualized by what authority grants for the service it has at first received. No individualism operates outside the structure of granting and serving. When authority fails to reward, to promote individualism, then its aureole progressively fades. The loss of this cliental power entails the weakening of individualism, and hence of the disposition to serve. Consequently, the domination-subordination relation becomes abstract, revealing the suppression of social mobility.

SURVIVAL AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

This study would not have devoted so much space to social mobility, were not its share in the survival of traditional Ethiopia eminent. Haggai Erlich has clearly and thoroughly conceptualized the contribution. In trying to answer the amazing question of how Ethiopia did "manage to survive to modern times, when other local civilizations crumbled in the face of European imperialism," he forwards the idea that "Ethiopia's strength and survival stem from its unique internal sociopolitical flexibility, rather than from the attributes and behavior of foreigners."¹⁰⁵ According to him, the fluidity and dynamism of the sociopolitical system

made possible a constant and intense power game, but prevented revolutions. Lacking class leadership . . . the country never experienced significant ideological politicization of its ethnic or linguistic diversity. Politics was shaped into a field of ceaseless struggles for power, but was practically deprived of ideological dimensions. Throughout the ages this system of values and institutions underwent no change, yet was capable—due to its political flexibility—of providing Ethiopia with tested leadership. It was under this leadership structure that permeated all ranks, that Ethiopian society could be recruited and mobilized, raising nationalist armies of great numbers rather than crumbling whenever faced with an existential challenge.¹⁰⁶

In short, the flexibility of the sociopolitical order prevented revolutions, downgraded ethnic diversity in favor of national unity, and provided able leadership. Let us examine these points one by one.

The persistence of ethnic sentiments has, we know, enticed many authors to characterize the country as a collection of small kingdoms. Our

question was: How could so divided and dispersed a country survive for so long? Our previous chapters have toiled at disclosing how little regionalism and ethnicity were opposed to national unity, how they themselves were dependent on the monarchy which, in other respects, they attempted to limit. The analysis of social mobility gives us a further argument in favor of unity. Insofar as the system allowed intense power struggles, it was at the same time diluting the possibility of ethnic confrontations through ideological politicization, as Erlich suggests. This type of politicization would have meant the hardening of the ethnic diversity and its transformation into confrontation, resulting (in the long run) in the breakup of the nation. Once ethnic traits are changed into antagonism, the conclusion that life together is impossible and oppressive would not have been long in coming.

This way of seeing things never developed because the constant pursuit of power struggle at all levels prevented the stabilization and monopolization of power. One was spurred on by the perspective of participating in the power game and of winning one's place, rather than in constructing a kingdom behind ethnic or linguistic barriers. This open and pervasive competition for power, while it inflated the ambition of individuals, was at the same time drying up the inclination towards the ideological politicization of ethnic identities. Political ambition craved for the larger national scene of struggle in comparison to which regional or ethnic realms appeared as stifling confinements.

Moreover, the power game provided a consensus, a passion whose gratification could not but enforce the desire to preserve existing institutions and, hence, the unity of the nation. As the system promoted power struggle by shunning the institutionalization of power, it obtained the consensus of all the actors, of those who aspired as well as of those who were in power. All could agree: no one being excluded, everybody could aspire. The relationship between those who had power and those who had not involved momentary winners and losers, not a privileged few and outcasts. We will have the chance to see the extent to which the hardening of ethnic personality in modern Ethiopia, its increasing transformation into ethnonationalism through ideological politicization, is partly due to the blockage of social mobility, manifested by such signs as the appearance of a hereditary nobility and monarchy.

A good example of this power game is provided by the competition between Yohannes and Menelik. In order to accede to the imperial throne, both used all means including treason. Just as Yohannes rose to power by

intriguing with the British against Tewodros (for which he was rewarded by firearms which he used to seize power), Menelik also constantly intrigued with foreign powers against Yohannes, even to the extent of not going to Yohannes' aid when he was confronting external invaders. Can we fail to see that this open competition for power dissuaded both from ideologically politicizing their ethnic background? Since they were competing for the same throne, they were bound to stand for the unity of the country and not its division. The purpose of the power game was not the creation of petty kingdoms, but attainment of the imperial throne, which was there for anybody to sit on regardless of his ethnic origin, provided he is the best, the most able. The generalization of this power game is enough to indicate the extent to which the system was liable to yield a tested leadership at every level.

Let us now examine the idea that social mobility prevented social revolutions. Presumably, Ethiopia survived because it avoided all along any major disruption of its social system. In this regard, the most common attitude is to believe that societies which undergo change are likely to resist and survive better than those which do not. Only in being open to change can societies be able to respond to internal and external challenges. If so, the position deriving survival from immutability, from the refusal to change, seems little defensible. Let us first clarify a point. Social change has resulted in greater adaptability every time it has succeeded in salvaging and enhancing the inner characters of the societies that it has affected. The theory according to which class struggle is the midwife of a better society has never been verified. Instead, societies which were prudent enough to avoid revolutions by promoting evolutionary changes have best succeeded, while those torn by revolutionary upheavals were either swept away or prevented from making any further progress by their own inner contradictions.¹⁰⁷

Not all change necessarily brings a positive outcome. It does so only when it aims at salvaging society, when it strengthens society's survival power. Positive change is a form of survival; it is mobility going into the service of preservation. Grant this law of change, and the flexibility of the Ethiopian system becomes its illustration. The system was structurally immune against revolution; this, in turn, diminished the necessity for social change. To be precise, the flexibility of the social structure enabled the renewal of elites and the promotion of the most ambitious individuals so that the need for revolution never accumulated.

This position is indeed an inversion of Marxism: survival is conditional not on revolution but on its avoidance. Flexible societies are capable of introducing evolutionary changes, while rigid societies have no other option than revolutionary solutions. Small wonder that the application of forcible and radical measures ends up by shattering them. The destiny of socialism is a good contemporary illustration of this law. So rigid was socialism that attempts to reform it entailed its disintegration. The great advantage of capitalism has been its flexibility: progressive reforms and renewal of elites have endowed it with a power of survival which defied repeated predictions of imminent collapse.

The linkage of the problem of survival with the avoidance of revolution must not be underestimated. Revolution heralds the shattering of internal unity which, in turn, makes society extremely vulnerable to outside invasions. More than anything else, internal disunity and absence of consensus expose society to external threats. Thus, if Ethiopia survived for so long, the reason lies in the maintenance of internal unity, in the prevention of social disruptions and revolutions. This is not to say that civil wars and ethnic conflicts did not exist; they did, but they were based on power struggle and did not undermine the consensus. Power struggle was a confirmation, a reassertion of the consensus, being more rivalry than antagonism about values and the system of government. No one intended to alter the system; only to control it.

How profound then must have been the deterioration of the system and the breakdown of the consensus for Haile Selassie to be overthrown by a revolutionary process in 1974! The reasons for the deterioration will be discussed later. Keeping in mind that we have only to direct our attention towards the blockage of social mobility, let us simply note how drastically the survival power of the Ethiopian society has been reduced, as events subsequent to the revolution will testify.

This explanation is likely to raise two kinds of objection. The one has to do with those scholars who are sensitive to the numerous conflicts which used to ravage traditional Ethiopia. To speak of a flexible society, still more of a consensus-based society, is for them a rambling discourse. The other objection comes from those who admit that no revolutionary disruptions ever threatened the traditional order but who require a different explanation than the flexibility of the system.

The first group of scholars draws its argument from the harsh exploitation and misery of peasants perpetuated by the *gebar* system. Not only was

no consensus evident, but the traditional society was subjected to endless conflicts between elites themselves and, most importantly, between elites and peasants. Peasant rebellions were endemic to the system, further aggravated by the intractable nature of authority. So inflexible was authority that people had a choice only between unconditional submission and rebellion. A third course by which consensus could have been built up through mutual concessions was anything but possible. "The traditionally oriented rulers of Ethiopia today cannot conceive of any middle course between [the] two extremes"¹⁰⁸ of submission and rebellion, says Markakis.

Interestingly, Markakis speaks of the traditional rulers such as they existed in modern times and who were a caricature of the traditional nobility. By the time of Haile Selassie, the sociopolitical order had lost its flexibility. Clientship was replaced by an implacable autocratic rule, all set against consensus. Elites were maintained in power by the force of the state, and no more by the support of followers and local people.

On the endemic nature of rebellion in Ethiopia, many authors have expressed their support. "Fighting might also be described as the national industry of Abyssinia. They have not only fought against other nations through the centuries, but have fought almost incessantly among themselves,"¹⁰⁹ one observer reminds us. More specifically, taking into consideration the instrumentality of exploitation in triggering many peasant uprisings, Gilkes writes that "the history of Ethiopia is full of such revolts although their significance has been obscured by the emphasis of observers on the importance of the nobility as leaders."¹¹⁰ Lefort also speaks of "the endless succession of revolts, part peasant rebellion, part feudal *jacqueries*, repressed in one place only to break out in another."¹¹¹

Though the frequency of peasant rebellions has been registered, yet no student of Ethiopia can come up with the slightest proof of a case where a peasant uprising questioned the landholding system and its superstructure. It is one thing to note rebellions, another to assert that they were the expression of a breakdown of consensus. In the numerous studies of Ethiopian history, I have not seen a statement indicating that peasants or their leaders demanded the reform of the *rist* system. What I have read, on the other hand, is how peasants were systematically against all attempts to alter the *rist* system. In the past, their opposition thwarted the transformation of the aristocracy into a landed class. During Haile Selassie's time, policies aimed at "modernizing" the land tenure caused rebellions. And, paradoxical as it may sound, northern peasants did not welcome Derg's

land reform, even though it was a deathblow to the interests of the nobility. Obviously, the Ethiopian peasantry was profoundly attached to the *rist* system and its superstructure. Even at the height of the Wollo famine of 1972, which exposed the rot of Haile Selassie's state, no claim for reform was heard from peasants. Nor was Haile Selassie overthrown by a peasant uprising, as the forces which brought him down were essentially urban.

The distinction must be made between a peasant protest due to the abuses of governors and *gult* holders and a peasant rebellion emerging from a deep discontent with the system itself. The latter never occurred in Ethiopia, the former was frequent. For example, the novel *Fikre Iske Mekaber* stages a peasant rebellion. According to an Ethiopian commentator, the novel treats of

the dialectical tension between the static form of an archaic social system and the dynamic content of the growing sociopolitical consciousness of the oppressed. The maintenance of the privileges of the ruling class is diametrically opposed to the needs and interests of the peasants. The conflict generated by this state of affairs is violently resolved in favor of the peasants.¹¹²

In other words, the novel relates the process of class struggle going on in the countryside.

Need I say that I agree with none of these interpretations? The peasants are neither questioning the privileges of the ruling class, nor showing a class consciousness intent on reforming the existing order. The rebellion breaks out at the abuses of *Fitawrari* Meshesha, who oversteps his due rights. A peasant delegation is first sent exhorting *Fitawrari* Meshesha not to ask more than his due. Only the systematic refusal of Meshesha triggered the peasant uprising which, be it noted, contested not his rights but his abuses. A peasant even says:

The power which gives you respect, authority, and superiority over us is not granted to you to harm us and to guard your sole interests; it is a reward for the protection of our life, property, and interest."¹¹⁹

Here is clearly expressed the nature of Ethiopian clientship. *Fitawrari* Meshesha's misuse of power damages the mutual interests and consensus on which it is based.

The peasant rebellion is ignited as soon as a rising and ambitious man takes the leadership. Our Ethiopian commentator regrets that the leader, by the name of Abeje Belew, "is not developed enough for a character that plays such a pivotal role in the whole book."¹¹⁴ Yet this should tell us that the major concern of the novel is not the alleged ongoing class struggle. Instead, what is interesting about Abeje Belew is that he is a bandit, a *shifta* who has so far defeated troops sent against him. Because of his military valor, "he was feared by the authorities as a divine chastisement and was loved by the common people as a protector and rising guardian."¹¹⁵ He is therefore the rising star, all confident of military victories and popular support, the typical hero that the traditional system was ready to integrate by its mobility. He also expresses the spirit of the traditional clientship, since the peasants see him as their protector sent by God to punish *Fitawrari* Meshesha's arrogance. Likewise, the success of their rebellion is due to the authority that Abeje gained over them: his tested leadership imparted to them the fighting spirit, making them defiant, confident, and victorious. No doubt about it: the novel acquaints us with all the ingredients of Ethiopian traditional meritocracy, be it with the spirit of clientship, the spell of authority and leadership, or the importance of military prowess.

If the saga of the hero is not pursued, nor his character developed, may it not be because the Ethiopian society can no longer accommodate people like him? The traditional system would have promoted Abeje to a brilliant career. As *Fitewrari* Meshesha also complained, the time of warriors and able leaders has been superseded by that of merchants and traders. In fact, far from being a revolutionary leader, Abeje is as anachronistic as *Fitewrari* Meshesha and, like the latter, he has no future in the changed society of Haile Selassie. The people expressed this by saying: "What is the use of wishing for the impossible when rank is inherited like syphilis?"¹¹⁶ Indeed, Haile Selassie's regime was wholeheartedly committed to changing rank into a hereditary entitlement.

Parallel to the frequency of peasant rebellions, scholars have noticed the persistent intervention of leaders of noble origin. Unfortunately, they do not reflect on the meaning of this intervention. Yet it indicates how little the rebellions were directed against the system, obvious as it is that the nobles would not lead the rebellions if they threatened the order. Why, then, do we not look for the meaning of the uprisings in something other than class struggle—for instance, in the need of ambitious individuals to

muster popular support so as to set themselves up as rival leaders? What scholars took for peasant rebellions would thus be the manifestation of the entrenched power struggle dispensing social promotion and demotion. This amounts to saying that the system had designed its own means of control. The full authority of those in power had to be exercised with restraint for fear of arousing rivals. So the system functioned with a minimum of consensus between the nobles and peasants, as the open competition for power obliged the former to seek, if not the support, at least the neutrality of the latter.

Studies of peasant rebellions can become accurate only if they refer to Haile Selassie's regime and after. For instance, take Gebru Tareke's book, *Ethiopia: Power and Protest*. The book begins with the remark that "collective resistance is rare," that people resist "individually, covertly, and nonconfrontationally, and therefore much less effectively in causing major changes in existing relations of domination and subordination."¹¹⁷ Whence comes, then, the protest pointed out in the title of the book? Precisely, the book links peasant protests and uprisings with the process of modernization in Ethiopia—that is, with the appearance of a centralized and bureaucratic state machinery. Only in the context of the changed traditional society can we really talk about peasant rebellions which did more than denounce abuses. Interestingly, all these rebellions were against the process of modernization perceived as a threat to the *rist* system in the north and as a dispossession of traditional land rights in the south. More protectionist than progressive, these protests confirm rather than deny the view according to which peasants were attached to the traditional land tenure, despite the gruesome description given by many scholars.

Mention should be made of the reason invoked by many authors to explain the absence of revolutionary social movements. It is a cultural reason, namely the renowned Ethiopian fatalism. Gebru mentions it when he speaks of "a basically docile and passive agrarian population that silently and fatalistically bore its hardships."¹¹⁸ However, his acceptance of the explanation is only partial precisely on the grounds that it underestimates the potential of peasant rebellion. No less hesitant is Hess: the life of peasants "has a stability tinted with a fatalistic view of nature and the world," and yet he says, "when Ethiopian society was more mobile, the peasant was rewarded for his military prowess by imperial land grants."¹¹⁹

Even though fatalism is blamed, the accusation is never followed through to the end. The reason for this inconsistency is the incompatibility of said

fatalism with other known characteristics of Ethiopian mentality, such as individualism, the tendency to defiance, the cult of the hero, the prickling of ambition. Recent observations of the readiness of Ethiopian peasants to improve their material life have convinced some scholars of the need to "evaluate the stereotype of the peasant as fatalistic, culture bound and resistant to change."¹²⁰ For, these scholars maintain, "whenever agricultural innovation has been initiated from above the Ethiopian peasant has shown a remarkable tendency to respond."¹²¹

Must we then pursue this line of thinking when those who proffer it temper their own view of fatalism with qualifications that empty it of its meaning? We would have done so, were it not for a subtler approach to fatalism defended by Dessalegn Rahmato in an article entitled "Famine in Peasant Consciousness: Aspects of Symbolic Culture in Rural Ethiopia." According to him, any serious study of the Ethiopian society and mentality must recognize the importance of the recurrent and widespread nature of famine in Ethiopia. So pervasive a scourge—between 1800 to 1988 alone more than 19 periods of widespread famine are recorded—must have profoundly affected the sociocultural reality. For instance, it has prevented "the rise of a propertied peasant stratum in the past,"¹²² as recurrent famines caused social instability and leveled down peasant life. Other than blocking social differentiation, famine made peasants so dependent that "a patron-client relationship" was instituted between them and their lords with the deplorable effect of eroding "class solidarity within the peasantry."¹²³ Concerning mental makeup, a natural disaster of this scale can only dispose peasants towards fatalism. Unable to fight against it, peasants had no other choice than to make it bearable by "silent and symbolic protest."¹²⁴

Granted the importance of famine, still the role assigned to it by Dessalegn in the making of the sociocultural setup is pitched a bit strong. As a matter of fact, contrary effects to those enumerated would have been equally possible. The more recurrent famine is, the greater should have been the solidarity and mutual assistance of peasants. At least this is what human beings tend to do when they face natural calamities. Rather than vertical links, horizontal solidarity should have been solicited. Famine should have also stimulated hoarding and prudence, perhaps even improvements in the method of production. People do manage to live even in desert areas. The culture of prudence in view of bad times might have well favored accumulation, and thus the rise of a peasant middle class. Last but

not least, massive migrations to better lands would have been a normal reaction.

All this is to say that famine has certainly reinforced the already existing characteristics, but it did not create them. The lack of class solidarity, the importance of patron-client relationship, and the readiness to accept the order of things can all be strengthened by the experience of repeated famines. This explains why the normal effects of famine—such as the activation of communal solidarity, of hoarding, etc.—veered off into a different set of attitudes.

In the end, I see no other explanation of the absence of significant social movements in traditional Ethiopian than to say that the system had, broadly speaking, obtained the consent of the peasantry. In particular, the mobility of the society diverted peasants from embarking on a subversive course of action. Famine could not activate peasant solidarity so long as each peasant toyed with the idea of going out of his condition, of rising to higher positions. However few those who succeed, class solidarity is bound to be suppressed wherever the perspective of mobility entices individualism.

Likewise, exploitation is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of revolutionary impulse. Only when the situation offers no hope of escape, when it is in a deadlock such that the rich and the poor are condemned to remain where they are with no possible shift of position, do people begin to nourish subversive ideas. Once the situation is blocked, the appeal of individualism naturally dwindles in favor of communal interests.

A greater insight into this problem may be gained if we situate Ethiopia in the context of Africa. Ethiopia shares with African societies the apathy towards revolutionary movements and utopian views of society. Unlike Europe and elsewhere, African traditional societies did not produce an exploitive class structure, and so proved immune to social revolutions. To paraphrase Cheikh Anta Diop, there were no revolts against the regime in Africa, but against those who applied it wrongly, that is, the unworthy princes.¹²⁵ The class system of Ethiopia does not invalidate a rapprochement between traditional Ethiopia and African societies. Though highly un-African, the Ethiopian class structure was nevertheless mitigated by the remains of African traits—for example, by the lack of a rigid distinction between classes, by their community of culture, above all by the possibility of social mobility. Everything appears as though the Ethiopian society was a kind of *modus vivendi* between class society and African

communalism. Dragged down by a communal background which precluded it from reaching a finished class structure, it kept the balance by tolerating mobility between different layers.

Accordingly, all those Ethiopian traits which seem to conflict harmonize as soon as they are viewed from the vantage point of social mobility. It explains why vertical ties were more important than horizontal ones. So long as vertical links are rewarding, communal ties fall into abeyance. The latter are not non-existent, as Levine suggests; simply, the possibility of vertical reward has precedence over them. Horizontal bonds thus smothered, class struggle and revolutionary social movements could not grow. Rebellions existed, surely, but they were attending not so much to collective interests as to individual ambitions. It is no surprise that these peasant rebellions were often led by members of the nobility.

Zera Yaqob, the Ethiopian thinker, can be adduced in support of this interpretation. He lived in the seventeenth century, a time when the Jesuits had great influence on Emperor Susenyos. In response to the rise of dangerous religious quarrels in Ethiopia, he produced a rationalistic thinking designed to reinstate consensus. He criticized many aspects of the traditional religion, such as fasting, asceticism in monastic life, the belief in miracles and revelations. His rationalism, based on the "sense of the absolute and exclusive sufficiency of human reason,"¹²⁶ spared almost nothing of the traditional beliefs. Yet so critical a thinker does not say a word about the class structure of the society, nor about the landholding system. Despite his determination to liberate the Ethiopians from the weight of tradition and to show them the road of happiness, peace, and unity, his thought contains not one iota of social utopia, not even of social reform. If a critical thinker of this caliber was silent on the social question, then how much more so may have been ordinary people?

The non-existence of social movement and utopia was bound to condition the culture of the ruling class itself. The class was ready to deal with anything except social upheavals directed against the class organization of the society. It was as accustomed to a ferocious and endless power struggle as it was alien to revolutionary movements. So much was this the case that when such movements occurred for the first time, during Haile Selassie's reign, they swept away the regime. The ruling class had not developed a culture able to handle this kind of situation. Endowed with a culture fashioned for power struggle, it was "entirely incapable of dealing with any social movement or grouping."¹²⁷

Since Haile Selassie's regime provoked a revolution by blocking the avenues to social mobility, the axiom according to which social mobility had created a large consensus enabling the traditional society to ward off revolutionary situations becomes evidence. No other reason can explain why all the attempts of Haile Selassie to reform the *rist* system aroused, as in Gojjam in 1962, great resistance on the part of peasants. Especially, peasants refused the privatization of landholdings. The explanation is their attachment to social mobility, given the fact that the freehold system

would, in effect, freeze a transitory pattern of landholding and social stratification at one moment in time. It would convert a fluid system of individual inequalities into a permanent pattern of economic and social stratification.¹²⁸

Indeed, freeholding would mean that owners who happen to possess more pieces of land would keep them permanently, while those who own less would be restricted to what they have. For the same reason northern peasants were hostile to the land policy of the Derg: nationalization of land froze mobility—not, however, by favoring the rich, but by levelling down everybody.

Not only did social mobility ensure a large consensus, it also caused the perpetual renewal of the elite. Such was the pattern of renewal that "because most men have ample experience both as superiors and subordinates, two Amhara of different rank . . . could change positions and each be perfectly at home in his new role."¹²⁹ Just as upward mobility, downward slides too were expected. The interchangeability of positions, inherent in the culture itself, has been accused of complicating the relationships between superiors and subordinates. It created between them a constant suspicion and tension to the point of dissuading the delegation of power. No doubt this state of tension existed, but more so with superiors who were not confident enough than with able and ambitious ones.

In any case, from the viewpoint of survival, this rule of competition and renewal of elites imposed by the power game has been crucial enough to endow Ethiopia with an able and tested leadership. The society had secured the means to defend itself by not allowing loss of vigilance and decline due to a prolonged exercise of power, such as a hereditary system would have inevitably produced. The system accorded reprieve to no one, especially to those who were at the top. In permitting the rise of powerful contenders, it levied on the ruling elite constant vigilance, the cult of lead-

ership, and warlike values. Here appears the full meaning of Mathew's remark: "it would have been surprising had this system produced a succession of *rois faineants*. It is remarkable that, except at intervals, it did not do so."¹³⁰

What we have said so far invites us to study the major motivation of the Ethiopians and their society. Since neither power nor property was hereditary and social mobility conditioned social relationships, lest our analysis remain partial it must indicate the pole towards which all the elements of the system gravitated. The Ethiopians often designated this pole by the word *idil*. English words such as chance, opportunity, fortune, fate, destiny can translate it, though none of them exhausts its Ethiopian meaning. The next chapter will try to unravel the deep significance of this notion in connection with the issue of survival.

Chapter Four

SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

This chapter constitutes the central part of this study, the part that the previous chapters design as their source. It is also the most ambitious, its target being nothing less than the analysis of the Ethiopian value system. The task is rendered difficult by the high level of generalization under which ideas and sentiments, otherwise distinct, fluid, and rainbow-hued, must be brought in order to make up a system. The difficulty is all the more arduous owing to the lack of written materials presenting Ethiopian values in a conceptualized fashion. Indeed, the Ethiopians have little taste for philosophy, even for psychological analysis, so that a general view of their value system is hardly available. Traditional literary works deal essentially with religious matters and the story of emperors. True, some degree of secularization accompanied by an interest in psychological and sociological investigations can be found in contemporary literary works, especially in novels. But these works are not reliable sources of information about the traditional mentality, tangled up as they are in the conflict between tradition and modernity. Rather than throwing light on the value system, most of these works smear it with ideas confusing traditional and modern values.

In spite of these difficulties, the work had to be done, for the simple reason that without the knowledge of the value system our understanding of the survival of Ethiopia remains unstable and undependable. When the economic, social, and political life is harnessed to the value system, the knowledge of its source of nutriment comes into sight. For fear of being one-sided or mechanical, the analysis must also bring out the correspondence between the social setup and the value system. After the description of the house, we must know what kind of person lived in it. Better said, in

order to understand why the house is so furnished and organized, the knowledge of the purpose of the inhabitant is essential.

Much assistance is expected from those scholars who have conducted a general study of Ethiopian society. Among others, I have in mind Donald Levine and Christopher Clapham. By going beyond the usual clichés about the Ethiopians, these students of Ethiopia have tried to grasp the Ethiopian mentality from within and to put a finger on what they believe to be the staple value of the society. To begin this study with the appraisal of their ideas is therefore appropriate.

THE METAPHYSICS OF WAX AND GOLD

In his book, *Wax & Gold*, Levine attempts the analysis of what he thinks to be the spirit of the Amhara and, by extension, of Ethiopian society in general. He derives this spirit from a dominant form of poetic expression, *semna worq*, translated as wax and gold. As he himself says, this "poetic phenomenon . . . constitutes both a key to the genius of Amhara culture and a highly distinctive Amhara contribution to Ethiopian culture."¹ The poetic form is "built on two semantic layers. The apparent, figurative meaning of the words is called 'wax'; their more or less hidden actual significance is the 'gold'."² The prototype being the superposition within a single verb of the apparent meaning on the hidden significance, ambiguity, or *double-entendre* pervades the whole style. This art of ambiguity is what Levine calls the genius of Amhara culture.

The poetic style is no doubt highly praised in Amhara culture. It was even deemed to be the crowning achievement of erudition in the traditional society. But the way Levine defines the style hardly accords with the place it is supposed to occupy. Rather than *semna worq*, the book stresses the pivotal place of authority and individualism in the Amhara society. Had the book been written without reference to the spirit of wax and gold, no essential loss of meaning would have occurred. Its usage is indeed very limited. According to Levine,

it provides the medium for an inexhaustible supply of humor . . . a means for insulting one's fellows in a socially approved manner . . . a technique for defending the sphere of privacy against excessive intrusion . . . the one outlet for criticism of authority figures."³

Scarcely can one maintain that these functions fulfill a "way of life."⁴ Moreover, other than the cult of ambiguity and duplicity, no positive approach to life seems to issue from the poetic form. All the analysis does is to give support to James Bruce's remark according to which "dissimulation, in all ranks of these people, is as natural as breathing."⁵

Yet other known facts, such as the deep religiosity of the Ethiopians and the place of authority, do not mesh with Levine's remarks. One important distinction which is never ambiguous or dissimulated is authority. An Ethiopian does not even take the least care to conceal his authority or to disguise it with courteous manners. Authority is displayed and affirmed with great stress and ostentation. On the subject of who rules, who has authority, no attenuation or ambiguity of whatever kind is customary. Ambiguity may permeate the behavior of the subordinate, but not the manners, place, and right of the superior. The individual who controls power can be contested, but not power as such; the frankness, firmness, and ostentation of power are appreciated.

According to Levine, the Amhara are "austere religionists and spirited warriors."⁶ How does this harmonize with the alleged infatuation for dissimulation? Can this religiosity be cultivated independently of loyalty and steadfastness? Knowing the great impact of religious ideas on Amhara culture, anything less than a strong sense of commitment rings false. The very survival of Ethiopia, this unfailing commitment to Christianity and to a long-standing sociopolitical system, militates against the importance attached by Levine to the "cult of ambiguity."⁷

May it not be, then, that the poetic style, as defined by Levine, is a degenerated and secularized form of a deeper mode of conception? Degenerated not in the sense of being distorted, but in the sense of being used for purposes outside the original function. Some such interpretation is forwarded by Albert S. Gérard, who detects in Ethiopian poetry "a unique kind of wisdom, dark and deep."⁸ In particular, the distinction between deeper and outer meanings would be "a propaedeutic to the study of religious texts."⁹ Its philosophical significance would be that "by affording exercise in fathoming secrets it 'opens the mind' and thereby enhances the student's ability to approach the divine mysteries."¹⁰ In other words, before being the art of cultivating ambiguity, the spirit of wax and gold carried a method of approaching religious texts and mysteries. Viewed from this angle, it turns out to be a method of grasping reality or truth in the manner of Western thinking, whose distinction between essence and

appearance is only too familiar. Evidently, wax stands for appearance and gold for essence or truth.

Remember Plato's simile of the cave. In order to explain the two orders of existence, the visible and the intelligible, Socrates imagines the case of prisoners held in a cave. The prisoners can only see the shadows of things projected on the wall by a fire. In this condition, asks Socrates, "would they not assume that the shadows they saw were real things?"¹¹ The simile presents the visible or the physical world as a projected and distorted image of the true world, which remains distinct. Knowledge consists in the ascent of the mind from appearance to reality. Not only is appearance veiling reality, it is also usurping its place by passing itself off as the truth. The purpose of knowledge is to reinstate the truth by denouncing the usurpation and discovering the veiled, hidden reality.

The method of wax and gold is quite reminiscent of this conception of things. Wax is the appearance which hides, veils reality. In falsely claiming the status of reality, it is perforce misleading. The gold is the truth, the essence, the object of knowledge: it is arrived at by brushing away the appearance. The goal of the method is to reinstate the truth by extracting it from a distorting veil. This is exactly how an Ethiopian scholar defines the spirit of wax and gold:

these two elements [wax and gold] have the same color, but the gold is hidden by the wax—and it is always the gold which gives the true meaning of the distich. It is obtained by pronouncing the words in a different way.¹²

Far from being the cult of duplicity, wax and gold is then the art of discovering and reinstating the truth. It is in fact a theory of knowledge on which an ontology is also grafted. The ontology affirms the dualism of reality, better still the existence of reality behind the visible appearance. Consequently, a form of knowledge able to distinguish between reality and its misleading double is required. In discerning and extracting in what is apparent the hidden truth, the knowledge declares its aptitude for understanding divine mysteries.

That the spirit of wax and gold is a real propaedeutic to religious studies becomes evident when we see to what extent it corresponds with the Ethiopian conception of the divine. For the Ethiopians, there is a fundamental duality in the nature of God. Though "everything that happens reflects His active will,"¹³ yet this will is not transparent, so that "Abyssinians

view God above all as *mystery*."¹⁴ The mystery of God and His omnipotence constitute the dyad appearance-essence. No direct, transparent correspondence exists between His will and its reflections in the visible world. Since reflections are such that the will is hidden, the knowledge of their real meaning requires the surpassing of the visible manifestation.

It is in the nature of things that the transcendent and boundless power of God cannot express itself through world phenomena without undergoing distortion. The immense disparity between the created world and God prevents any direct translation so that the language of God is not outwardly intelligible. Moreover, the visible world is impregnated with the tendency to appear independent and self-sufficient. This pretension to self-sufficiency is the manner in which deceit is instilled into the thinking of human beings. In this sense, the poetic style expresses the deep religiosity of the Ethiopians, the complete dependence of the created world on the Creator, its utter nothingness outside the will by which it exists and is what it is. The religiosity is stamped with deep wisdom since, behind the pretension of all things to being entities, it detects the gold which controls their nature and destiny. Plowden gives a good idea of this dependence:

The name of God is nowhere in such constant use as in the mouths of the Abyssinians. They imagine a special interference in every act of their lives, and in everything that occurs to themselves. A thief will piously praise God for having assisted him a dangerous robbery; a man will say, 'God threw my enemy in my way, and I slew him;' the death of a dog, the breaking of a bottle, a slip in the mud, are sufficiently important to be attributed to the immediate will of the Divinity.¹⁵

In defining the moral implications of the Ethiopian poems, an Ethiopian author rightly says: they "teach patience to those who suffer, moderation to those who are happy, to the former the eventuality of becoming the latter."¹⁶ The complete dependence on God turns every acquired thing into a mere gift, but even more so into a fleeting possession. Everything is reversible and nothing is definitively acquired. To think otherwise is to be the victim of appearances and to forget who is the master of all things. What has been called duplicity or dissimulation is in reality the deep sense of the fleeting nature of things, of the reversal of fortunes and positions, of the absolute dependence of all things on God. Things, including living beings and persons, are not ends in and of themselves; they are by and for

God. They are, so to speak, no more than puppets. To know this is wisdom, for disasters await those who, overlooking this dependence, consider themselves as entities. For the Ethiopians, these people commit the highest sin, the sin of presumption and arrogance that they express by the words *tigab* or *tibit*.

Before analyzing this point further, let us ponder Clapham's approach, for the sake of widening our investigation. More consistent than Levine, Clapham resolutely places authority at the center of all Ethiopian motivations. After having described the background of fierce competition for power, which infuses the Ethiopian mentality with "aggressiveness" and "self-assertiveness," he sets off "the Big Man or *teleq saw*," defined as "the authority figure *par excellence*, by virtue of his high birth or individual prowess, and is accorded universal respect."¹⁷ As one may gather from our previous chapters, Clapham touches here an important feature of Ethiopian culture. Knowing the cardinal place of war in Ethiopian society, the ideal figure could be none other than the hero. Everybody bows to him to pay homage to the value most revered by the society: the combination of aggressiveness and military valor. Typically, what defined the Ethiopian culture was the cult of the hero, which barely agreed with the cult of dissimulation. On the contrary, dissimulation betrayed the distinctive demeanor and weapon of the weak.

Doubtless, Clapham's analysis will not be complete without the world conception, the metaphysics buttressing this cult of authority. All the more reason for delving into the metaphysics is the absence of institutionalization. Authority, Clapham notes, though much adulated and feared, was never institutionalized. What is more contradictory than to venerate authority while refusing to shield it against ups and downs, incidents, and usurpations? If, as stated in the previous chapters, power was essentially an object of contest while being so revered, the ultimate resolution of this apparent contradiction points to the metaphysical outlook sustaining the conception of authority.

In effect, do we not feel how conducive this conception of authority was to the wisdom of wax and gold? Suppose you say that authority or power, however absolute, is only an appearance, that God alone has power or lends power. No sooner is this belief admitted than the institutionalization of power becomes problematic. In point of fact, the conception of the Ethiopians derived the glory of power from its metaphysical stature. Power is not a mere phenomenon of the world; it binds the created world to the

Creator and determines its fate. It is therefore the most visible manifestation of the will of God, its favored language. Accordingly, those who have power in this world appear as those to whom God lends power. So conceived, power in this world denotes divine favoritism; it is a distinction from the common people, a sign of election. This belief tied every Ethiopian more to God than to his/her superior.

The deep reason for the non-institutionalization of power is just this interpretation of power, at whatever level, as divine lending. Flowing from an act of favoritism which always keeps its secret, power refuses to be conceived as a right inscribed in the blood, as a hereditary entitlement. The wisdom of wax and gold places behind the assurance of human authority the mystery of the Being who alone gives and takes away power.

Imagine, then, how consistently this uncertainty about power and the identity of the elect imparts to the Ethiopian personality a characteristic anxiety mixing political ambition with religious piety. Indeed, as an expression of divine choice, political position is more than an earthly prerogative; it indicates how a person is treated by God and (by extension) his/her chance of salvation. It is no exaggeration to say that political ambition amounted to a religious quest. Therefore, nothing could concern the Ethiopians more than the knowledge of the place allotted to each Ethiopian. They call this concern *idil*, that is, chance, fate, fortune, etc. The concern, it should be admitted, is at the antipodes of fatalism and resignation, since fate is not so much a certitude as a constant quest. Plowden expressed this idea when he said: "Each man considers himself as born to great destinies, and the smallest spark sets fire to his ambition."¹⁸

No belief better illustrates the thesis hailing social mobility as the central myth of Ethiopian society than this notion of fate. For only through an open mobility could the society placate the inner anxiety provoked by the uncertainty of fate. When individuals constantly inquire about their destiny, the institution of an open society is the only advisable response. Previous chapters have related the survival of the Ethiopian system to its ability to accommodate ambitious individuals. Now we know that this virtue had roots in the value system. Posit a culture for which the destiny and place of individuals are anything but certain or fixed in advance, and the renewal of elites becomes imperative. The die, the wisdom of wax and gold says, is never cast once and for all, for there is always the puzzle of the purveyor of destiny.

Before studying in detail the specific traits of Ethiopian piety, a deeper understanding of the ontology, of the nature of the relationship governing appearance and essence, would be of great help. We saw how the distinction between essence and appearance is reminiscent of ancient Greek conceptions. We may go even further and compare the conception of wax and gold with the Heraclitean view of being. As in Heraclitus' philosophy, not only does reality hide, it is also making and unmaking appearance. Wax and gold thus approaches a dialectical conception: because it unites opposites, doing and undoing result in the recasting of destinies, in the reversal of positions. Just as for Heraclitus "war is the father of all and king of all . . . some he makes slaves, others free,"¹⁹ so too the game of wax and gold executes reversals of position between superiors and subordinates. This change of destiny between superiors and subordinates is so accepted that, Plowden reports,

if, on the morrow, by some freak of fortune not unfrequent, they should reverse positions . . . there is scarcely one of those who stand humbly to serve to-day, that would not to-morrow grace the seat of honour and issue his commands as well as his nobly-born master, who in his turn would find no awkwardness in handing the mead-horn or saddling the horse of his quondam domestic.²⁰

This acceptance of the reversibility of positions, conveying as it does an acute sense of the transient nature of power, does insinuate to what extent the ways of fate according to the Ethiopians echo those of the Logos of Heraclitus.

Needless to say, the limit of this rapprochement between Western philosophy and Ethiopian thinking must be delineated if confusion is to be avoided. While it is true to say that both forms of thinking had in common the distinction between essence and appearance, divergent evolutions caused them to move apart. Especially after the Renaissance, Western thinking tended to recognize greater consistency to appearance, thereby generating a dualistic conception of being. As appearance was acquiring more consistency and autonomy, there grew the possibility of scientific knowledge. The belief that nature is governed by objective laws required the acceptance of its self-sufficiency and substantiality. Inversely, the capacity to know and control nature endowed human beings with more freedom and autonomy. Be it the Cartesian notion of material substance and its mechanical movement or Kant's concept of phenomena, nature was

increasingly conceived of as autonomous. As was foreseen by Aristotle, God became progressively the prime mover: One who sets the machine once and for all, after which the world functions by itself and according to fixed laws, which are then the object of scientific knowledge. The study of objective laws enabled human beings to increase their power over nature, and hence to become "the masters and possessors of nature."²¹ From this time onwards, the relation of human beings with God would be conceived less in terms of dependence than in terms of achieved merit whereby humans could prove how worthy they are of God.

The Ethiopian metaphysics never followed this course of thinking. It clung to the distinction between essence and appearance and made no attempt to inject a bit of reality and autonomy into appearance. If anything, the dependence was increased to the point that phenomena of the world, far from appearing as law-governed, became the unfolding of a struggle whose sole purpose was to ascertain the ineluctable triumph of God. The dialectical aspect was maintained, but without evolving objective laws and attributing real properties to phenomena. What things are and become results from the struggle imposing perpetual inversions, whose purpose is to celebrate the victory of God. The properties of an object, their alteration and transformation into something else, are not caused by mechanical or evolutionary laws; they are the products of decrees whose function is to evince the way God takes away whatever He has given. No sooner does water boil and reach the climax of its power than it decays. It was nothing, save to point out, through its rise and decline, the absolute power of God. It appeared, showed a semblance of autonomous power, then lost it. Therefore, neither dualism nor law-governed nature: what the West calls law, regularity in nature, is simply the permanent display of rise and fall, life and death, through which the Master of the world attests himself.

If at all costs we must find an European equivalent to Ethiopian thinking, sophistication aside, Berkeley might be a candidate. Berkeley criticized dualism because it furnishes created things with too much reality and autonomy *vis-à-vis* God. For those who know that God alone exists, Berkeley reminds, matter cannot be a substance nor material things self-sufficient entities. Things exist by and for the spirit which perceives them, and "there is *not any other substance than spirit*"²² so that the "*absolute existence of sensible objects in themselves or without the mind*" involves "either a direct contradiction, or else nothing at all."²³ Therefore, physical

things are ideas, mental representations, not real beings. In refusing dualism, Berkeley occupies a peculiar place in Western thinking, essentially due to the taste of a non-Western type of thinking. Let us set our mind at rest, however: Berkeley will quickly return to the fold of Western philosophy by accepting a law-governed nature whose order, steadiness, and coherence testify "the wisdom and benevolence of its author."²⁴ The necessity of accounting for the possibility of scientific knowledge could scarcely offer him a different option.

Not so for the Ethiopian, who would consider Berkeley's statement on nature as blasphemous and inconsistent. God is not under the exigency of order save his own pleasure, any more than he is tied down to any law of whatever kind. We must dwell in this unfathomable mystery if we mean to preserve the sense of the divine. If there is regularity, not constraint but sheer free will is producing it. In the end, the Ethiopians seem to be more consistent than Berkeley: just as they do not have any word to express what the West understands by matter, so do they not conceive of the laws of nature otherwise than as a divine fiat.

Paradoxically, on this particular point there seems to be an agreement between the modernist Descartes and the Ethiopian "metaphysics." For Descartes, too, God is beyond any law: the laws which now govern the world are His wishes. They are not necessary and could have been different. To think otherwise is to assume that we can know the end for which everything is created. To quote Descartes:

We shall not stop to consider the ends which God has set before Himself in the creation of the world and we shall entirely set aside from our philosophy the search for final causes; for we should not take so much upon ourselves as to believe that God could take us into His counsels.²⁵

Something like the Ethiopian sense of God's mystery seems to be at work here. So un-Western was Descartes's suggestion that it will appear to Spinoza as an intolerable contradiction. According to him, the source of this contradiction is dualism: once nature is posited as distinct from God, it is perforce limiting Him. Hence Spinoza's conclusion that "*besides God no substance can be granted or conceived*,"²⁶ and that "extended substance is one of the infinite attributes of God."²⁷ Pantheism is the only logical conclusion of the belief that God alone exists.

While the Ethiopian belief will feel some sympathy towards the Spinozistic conception, yet it will retort to Spinoza as well as to Descartes that their notion of God is not lofty enough. It will tell Descartes that to posit an autonomous material substance is to limit the reality and power of God. As to Spinoza, his support for the omnipotence of God hardly squares with his statement that "God does not act according to freedom of the will"²⁸ but according to universal and necessary laws. The attribution of necessity to nature is inconsistent with God's omnipotence. Only the idea that natural phenomena might not have been or might have been different suits the infinite power of God. The world is a manifestation of God, but never in a necessary fashion.

All in all, the conception of God which best accords with His infinitude is for the Ethiopians the interplay of wax and gold, whereby appearance is denounced through the reassertion of God as the sole true Being. A further clarification is here necessary. For instance, in Hegel's dialectical conception, the truth is always affirmed after a fight and in a dramatic fashion. In a sense, this is quite Ethiopian; so is the view that every phenomenon is always a usurpation, being but pregnant with the new, with the defiant power. But here stops the agreement, for in Hegel the appearance is finally reconciled with the truth, whose expression it becomes. The struggle was caused by the inadequacy of the appearance, and the purpose of evolution or development is to render the appearance adequate to the essence. In the words of Hegel:

The true is the whole. But the whole is only the essence perfecting itself through its development. Of the absolute it should be said that it is essentially result, that it is only in the end what it is in truth.²⁹

Such adequacy is for the Ethiopian unthinkable: the appearance is not the essence, nor is there any conceivable process by which the two can be reconciled. In a word, the adequacy is permanent and remains so. On the other hand, appearance is swollen with the desire to become self-sufficient, to put on the traits of reality, in short to rebel. The purpose of the struggle is to quell this desire so that its defeat becomes the demonstration, the proof of the triumph of God's will.

So the struggle, if such we call movement, ends not with reconciliation, but with the victory of God, that is, the submission of the creature to

the Creator. According to the Ethiopians, this outcome reveals the meaning of life, which is not to realize potentialities or to conquer freedom, nor even to achieve happiness; it is to become an instrument in the universal process of God asserting Himself. Since this self-assertion is attained by constantly doing and undoing the apparent world, the only viable religious and moral attitude is submission to His will. The visible world is the display of perpetual defiance and defeats, it is all strewn with corpses which were crushed because they wanted to be on their own. We call this life and death, rise and decline—in a word, time, the great generator and dissolver, the elusive flow against which all creatures are immeasurably powerless.

The actors of this dramatic self-assertion are the phenomena of this world, set as they are against each other. In this universal fight of good against evil, all a person can desire is to be on the winner's side by becoming the instrument of God. The intense anxiety of the Ethiopians stems from this desire to play the good role, to be the elect, the favorite of God. In opposition to the camp of God, the camp of evil is characterized by the tendency to assert itself by defying God. Through the prostration of this arrogance, the omnipotence of God is reasserted. In other words, this conception, which is wholly biblical, torments each Ethiopian with one question: am I on the right side? Tewodros expressed this anguish beautifully when he uttered at the height of his power: "I well know that God will raise whom He will and will cast down whom He will."³⁰

Such a non-dualistic conception of reality scarcely stimulates the manipulation of nature and the acquisition of scientific knowledge. Since things do not have the principles of their life and motion within themselves, since they are but puppets whose strings are pulled by an infinite Being, they do not possess in themselves the key to their own knowledge. In being simply the scene of God's drama of self-assertion, nature does not exist by itself, still less can it become an object of manipulation. Levine's judgement that the Ethiopian "has no drive to conquer or to become master over nature"³¹ is right. For the same reason, however, the Ethiopians are not inclined to deify nature, or to "keep nature in equilibrium through a system of rituals."³² How could they do so when natural things are only empty shells with no intrinsic power whatsoever?

The Ethiopian approach to nature prescribes neither ritualization and magic, nor objectification and manipulation. It would be best defined as a teleological attitude: natural things being without "minds or laws of their

own," it follows that "nature is simply the passive agent of God's rewards and punishments."³³ Defiance entails punishment, submission reward. The peasant who fails to obey the orders of the Orthodox Church expects the ruin of his crops. For the self-assertive God, the world-order would best suit the desire of human beings if they submit to His will. In fact, submission will yield protection, preference, and favoritism in terms of earthly rewards. Unlike the Western mind, which values the propensity to impress God by achievements, the Ethiopian is rather of the opinion that humility is the only viable attitude towards God. What is expected from individuals is the correct fulfillment of the role assigned to them by God, and so to be worthy of their *idil*.

The manipulation of nature is the opposite of submission: it contemplates nothing less than the introduction into nature of orders and effects not ordained by God. By contrast, agricultural work is praised by the Ethiopians: it is prayer. You sow according to the natural order, and for this patience and submission you are rewarded with crops. The experimental attitude, which is intent on discovering phenomena concealed deliberately by God, will only result in punishment. Not to confine oneself to what God has benevolently revealed is simply transgression.

Moreover, the equation of appearance with veiling and usurpation does little to incite the Ethiopian mentality to magnificent and complex material realizations. From the Western point of view, appearance must be the expression of essence. The more sublime the appearance, the greater is its adequacy to the essence. Magnificent material realizations (great palaces and churches, impressive vestments, decorations, etc.) become means to accomplish adequacy, once the outward is greeted as the expression of the inward. Quite the opposite for the Ethiopian: however sublime and refined the outward may be, it will usurp rather than express the inward. In fact, the more magnificent the countenance, the higher becomes the deception. The best way is to reduce the pomp as much as possible. This seems to be the message of Ethiopian traditional painting. Despite its relative technical sophistication, its bare and skimpy aspect—as compared with European painting (which is full of flesh, color, volume, and form)—is evidence of a deliberately impoverishing conception of sensuous reality. God is signified not so much by magnificence as by contrast of the kind which makes physical presentations poorer than their contents. Only contrast can preserve and suggest the antinomy between wax and gold. Because it purposely shuns the search of adequacy, Ethiopian art is more symbolic than representative or descriptive.

The haunting presence of contrast was suggested when the influence of geography on Ethiopian mentality was discussed (Chapter One). The need to express contrasts accounts so well for the wax-and-gold mentality that the latter can be said to be made in the image of the environment. Are not the different layers of meaning reflecting the geographical contrasts of high mountains and deep valleys? More yet, do not the interlocking of different physical aspects suggest that in each thing dwells a secret which transcends it? Just as climbing or descending enables you to go from one physical feature to another, so too the wax-and-gold poetry passes from one meaning to another by pronouncing a word differently, as though, like geographical formations, meanings were arranged in layers. Nor is this all. The disparities of geography give the accurate picture of fate. The geographical array of interlocking levels draws the visible image of hierarchy in which what a level is depends on its contrasted relations with other levels. Here are no innate properties, as everything flows from placement. So it is with social hierarchy: the contrast between the above and the below determines each place. Owing to these contrasted relations, the individual who occupies a given place seems to be fated. Indeed, the occupation of a place so constituted can only appear as an allotment or assignment.

Likewise, a placement is by definition liable to alteration. And the context of contrast turns this alteration into a reversal of positions, acting, so to speak, like a revolving door. Such is the way the Ethiopian social mobility is conceived: the structure remains intact, simply people change positions. The warning of wax and gold is that a different pronunciation is enough to effect important changes of meaning. Wax and gold therefore conveys the picture of divine fiat infusing an intrinsic precariousness into the life of the created world. It costs God nothing to change a king into a slave or a slave into a king. Put otherwise, social mobility is the corroboration of this metaphysical nothingness.

Need we stress that the backing of the social structure by a metaphysical belief makes it even more resistant? The Ethiopians find in the social organization the proof of their inner and deep longing, the reflection of their greatest attachment. The social organization mirroring the belief and the belief the social organization, there occurs a mutual reinforcement. What else but an unwavering and fanatical attachment can result from the equation of the defense of the social organization with the defense of faith and vice versa? And I let the reader imagine the state of decrepitude into

which the Ethiopians can fall if the social scene is so altered that they can no more read the confirmation of their belief.

Let it be added that the spirit of wax and gold contains an inexhaustible source of hope. The conception is utterly alien to despair: if nothing is final and all is reversible, then a protracted will to resistance is a likely outcome. The inversion inherent in wax and gold ranks endurance and patience (*tigist*) among the highest virtues. Conversely, the Ethiopians are particularly prone to denounce precipitation and haste (*chikola*), which they liken to childish behavior. Whether due to war or to something else, disaster is only a momentary setback. It is worth noting that the Ethiopian notion of time (*gize*) expresses less continuity or evolution than temporariness, thus heralding reversals. It could not be otherwise, since the Ethiopians so easily relate reversal with disobedience or *tigab* that they always foresee the possibility of forgiveness through expiations. Hence the paramount importance of fasting, which is believed to cause literally the deflation of *tigab*, that is, of satiety. Hence also the proliferation of prophets who announce the impending transformation of disaster into rebirth. What else could come out of this magic of changing disasters and defeats into messengers of victory and revival but an unbending will to survival?

ETHIOPIAN RELIGIOSITY

With these metaphysical remarks, the study can probe into the specific traits of Ethiopian religiosity. Even if Ethiopia follows the main beliefs and rituals of Orthodox Christianity, scholars have not failed to remark the strong native flavor of its religion, without however being able to spell it out clearly. Most of them impute this specific trait to the survival of Judaic and pagan beliefs. The statement is true but not sufficient to define the peculiarity of the religious inspiration of Ethiopia.

The rejection of metaphysical dualism is confirmed by the monophysite doctrine of Orthodox Christianity. The fact that "the two natures of Christ was rejected by the Ethiopian Church along with the Coptic Church,"³⁴ in favor of the single, divine nature of Christ, shows the natural sympathy of the Ethiopians for the conception advocating the utter dependence of the created world. All things exist by and for God alone; they are not substances and have no end of their own. Only God "is" in the true sense of the word, since everything is the expression and instrument of His will. For this conception, the single divine nature of Christ stands to reason. We

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are far from the Aristotelian idea of things having their own end or *telos* and striving to realize it. When things seem to be doing this, the Ethiopians warn, they are but accomplishing the divine will which animates and controls them.

We shall not, for instance, consider the emperor as the representative of God, as though there were a delegation of divine power. The definition of the emperor as the elect of God is clear enough: he is an instrument chosen to fulfill a divine assignment. He is not a substitute for God, but a tool in the service of God's will. The specificity of this service prevents the power of the emperor from dominating the Church or from conflicting with its role. The functional differentiation between Church and state does imply that each performs a specifically assigned task. Because emperorship is an allotment, neither can emperors be accorded a hereditary status. The intervention of divine choice so individualizes it that it is better thought of as a happening, a destiny, than as an innate or hereditary right. It is an appointment, a *shumet*, and as such subject to a recurrent and specific designation.

Much of the background of this conception of God can be traced back to Orthodox Christianity. The centrality of the notion of hidden God is a case in point. "Do not distress yourself in trying to know the beginning and the end of God,"³⁵ advises an Ethiopian writer, for human beings can never reach the knowledge of God. What can be expected is not that human beings change God into an object of knowledge, but that God reveals Himself to them. If we are to believe Olivier Clément, such is also the position of the Orthodox Church in general: revelation is "pure grace by which God reveals Himself as He wants, when He wants, without ceasing to be in the very revelation the Inaccessible."³⁶ Revelation occurs when the energies by which God manifests Himself reach human beings and animate them. The person chosen to communicate with God thus receives a "ray of divinity which penetrates and metamorphoses his created nature."³⁷

I cannot help comparing this notion of divine ray with the Ethiopian view of *idil* and election. Being a divine gift, *idil* is individualized, temporary, and revocable. It has also the capacity to animate and impel the recipients. Even so, the transcendence of God remains as absolute as ever, the received energy being infinitesimal. No way goes from human beings to God; the movement is always descending from God to human beings

whereby they receive individualized vocations. This descending and allocating movement determines the place and capacity of each individual.

Owing to the inaccessibility of God, the Ethiopian monk, as was the case with the Byzantine Church³⁸, could hardly pretend to be a scholar. The knowledge of God being impossible, theological depth and subtleties are vain. The right attitude for a negligible being is the fervent practice of prayer, supplication, penitence, and humility. Even if Orthodox spirituality "stresses the exploit of repentance and humility, it ignores the acquisition of merits,"³⁹ says Clément. No other Church has followed this spirit of Orthodox Christianity so faithfully as the Ethiopian Church. Though observers have deplored the lack of theological refinements and the moral laxity of the secular clergy, many have lauded the monastic clergy's peerless pursuit of "a strict life of extreme asceticism in almost complete seclusion."⁴⁰ In accordance with Orthodox spirituality, rather than intellectual depth, prayer, supplication, and repentance were the exclusive occupation of Ethiopian monasticism.

Remarkable also, however, are the African traits with which Ethiopian Christianity is tinged. Granted, as a Christian outlook, the religion is completely alien to the cult of ancestors and does not regard kinship as a sacred institution. Even the Ethiopian view of the Almighty is radically different from the African conception. While "there is in Africa south of the Sahara a common belief in a Supreme Being who ultimately controls human destinies," nevertheless he is "so remote . . . that he plays little part in daily cults or in the mythic imagination of the people."⁴¹ This conception of an aloof Supreme Being is radically alien to the Ethiopians. For them, God is omnipresent, controlling everything in slightest detail.

Important as these differences may be, they must not be allowed to minimize the similarities. For though remote, God is for the Africans the maker of destiny. Speaking of the Akan theory of destiny, W. E. Abraham writes that "each man was a spirit sent into the visible and natural world to fulfil a particular mission."⁴² Just as in the Ethiopian conception, the African thinking does not posit the kind of dualism which would allow individuals to become makers of their destiny. Contrast this conception with the Western notions of self-realization and freedom. The attribution of a great degree of autonomy and initiative to human beings has relieved the West of the need to conceive of destiny as a lot apportioned to each person by the Supreme Being.

To believe in destiny and in God as maker of destiny, all distinction between the supernatural and the natural must be abolished. The rejection of dualism means that in the secular world phenomena not dictated by the supernatural reality do not happen. Given the reluctance of the African mind to apprehend the world as unfolding according to inner laws, little wonder it did not suspect the possibility of scientific knowledge and technical manipulation. Instead, it pandered to magic, to the belief that physical properties and events could be modified by mere spiritual invocations.

Without the influence of Christianity, the Ethiopian thinking would not have escaped from the infatuation of magic. Still, some remains of this African penchant are visible. In particular, the paramount importance of angels and saints, especially of the Virgin Mary, points to a sublimated transfer of the role of spirits and lesser gods in African religions as "agents of the one Supreme God."⁴³ But there is more to the matter than this. Even convinced of the absolute control of God over everything, an Ethiopian prefers to address his/her demands and supplications not to God Himself, but to intermediaries in the form of numerous saints and angels—not because God is believed to be remote, but because the Ethiopian finds essentially untactful all attempts to deal with God without the protection of a spiritual patron. Is not this attitude an altered, Christianized version of the cult of ancestors? Just as African ancestors acted as patrons to their descendants in their dealings with God, so too saints and angels interceded with God on behalf of the Ethiopians who place themselves under their protection. The effectiveness of patronage and intercession was strongly admitted, especially as social relations and promotion were believed to provide evidence. Because of this, the interpretation of earthly promotions as manifestations of spiritual patronage was current.

Religious clientelism offers an intimate understanding of Ethiopian religiosity. It explains those aspects of the Ethiopian faith which, though derived from Christianity, are stressed by the Ethiopians more than is common. For instance, it explains why for the Ethiopians the highest vice, the crime of *lèse-majesté*, is *tigab*. In its physical sense, *tigab* expresses satiety, repleteness, in the moral sense arrogance, conceit, presumption. What could be more offensive to God and saints than the arrogance of their clients? The objection would be to say that the place of arrogance in Ethiopian Christianity is not surprising, since according to Christianity it was the first sin committed by Adam. Yes, but this original Christian

attitude towards arrogance has greatly diminished in the Western version of Christianity. Western achievements, be they in science, technology, art, philosophical and social ideas, would not have been possible unless and until presumption had lost much of its original evilness. After all, the Western idea of becoming master and possessor of nature—of being, if not God, at least the image of God, even in His creative power—is presumption in the view of pristine Christianity. The Ethiopians have maintained the original belief, hence their religiosity is not intelligible unless arrogance is taken as the hub of evilness.

Others factors too tend to stress the role of arrogance. One aspect on which many expatriate scholars agree in their description of the Ethiopian character is the national propensity towards presumption. Thus, for Perham the most striking character of the Ethiopians is "their overwhelming self-satisfaction," which she attributes to the survival of Ethiopia, to the "long mastery upon their plateau, their almost unbroken success in throwing invaders back from it and their complete ignorance of the world beyond."⁴⁴ Feeding on conservatism and contempt for other nations, this self-satisfaction assures the Ethiopians of the uselessness of changing or learning from other peoples. The Ethiopians have no need to change or to imitate other habits. For Rey, too, pride (the national character of the Ethiopians) stems from the successful defense of Ethiopian values and independence. As a result, "they regard themselves as the equal of the white man,"⁴⁵ which is a polite way of saying that their pride borders on vanity. Plowden is more categorical. "In fact," he remarks, "the great national characteristics of Abyssinia, from the highest to the lowest of the realm, are vanity and *insouciance*."⁴⁶ No less affirmative is Parkyns, who makes of vanity the "chief and besetting sin"⁴⁷ of the Abyssinians. On the subject of vanity, Bruce's remarks are also numerous. It looks as though all the other traits imputed to the Ethiopians, such as aggressiveness, conservatism, love of secrecy and intrigue, authoritarianism, even individualism, were variations of the same fundamental vice, namely, vanity.

Even if the Ethiopians rarely admit their tendency to vanity, preferring to settle on pride, there is no doubt that deep in themselves they feel its constant pressure. Witness the primary concern of their religion, which is to contain arrogance, to suppress *tigab*. Christianity in its biblical version gives them the true picture of their fundamental vice and its dangers. So they try to gather from Christianity the justifications and the forces to subdue arrogance, to draw a line of demarcation between legitimate pride

and the excessive tendency to conceit. In addition to Christian teachings, the cultivation of deference to authority with "a high sense of decorum and public manners"⁴⁸ is intended to tame arrogance. The question of whether the Ethiopians have been successful is less important than the formidable arsenal they have mobilized to fight against their inclination.

Assuredly, the emphasis on an omnipotent and omnipresent, almost capricious Supreme Being, inculcates in the Ethiopians the sense of their nothingness, of their utter dependence and feebleness. In this respect, no life illustrates better the truth of this teaching for the Ethiopians than the life of Tewodros. Their fascination with Tewodros stems from the demonstrative value of his life: raised by God from nothing, Tewodros was soon possessed by *tigab* and was consequently crushed. Ethiopian society does not shrink from using any and all means necessary to extinguish this *tigab*. Social customs are full of injunctions imposing extreme forms of deference to authority, confirming the priority of the need to smother arrogance. The clientship pervading the Ethiopian life in all its manifestations cannot function unless the answer to the question as to "Who is the master?" is firmly and constantly inlaid into the mind of each Ethiopian, whatever be his/her position and concern. When the Ethiopians forget the answer, then they are seized by *tigab*, which is disrespect, but also a radical rejection of the social, moral, and religious values underpinning the whole structure.

The physical sense of *tigab*, better the transformation of the physical sense into a moral and religious meaning, is quite indicative of its essence. For a country which is struck by periodic famines, which therefore lives on the constant rhythm of reversal of satiety to hunger, *tigab* must be vested with a deep religious significance. It affects the relation of the Ethiopians with nature, and hence with God who controls nature. Famine is precisely the great reminder, the metaphysical messenger of divine mastery. As Dessalegn Rahmato noted, "the chain of destructive events is attributed to *tigab*."⁴⁹ Satiety clouds the mind and heart of human beings as to who is the master; it gives the illusion of self-sufficiency, thus stirring up the rebellious mind. Then famine strikes, as both a reminder and a punishment.

Of course, this conception dismisses the perception of famine as a naturally caused phenomenon. The manifest function of famine is to reinstate the religious clientelism by showing clearly who controls what and who is the master. The remedy for famine is prayer and supplication, which alone are able to refurbish the damaged cliental relationship. Such is the way Menelik reacted against the grave animal typhus epidemic which ravaged

Shoa in 1889 and was soon followed by a form of dysentery killing many people. He issued the following proclamation:

"When the animal epidemic was starting, I made a proclamation, saying 'Pray to God'. The animals were . . . all dead . . . all this happened because we have not prayed enough. Now the epidemic is turning to people and has begun to destroy them." The emperor admonished his people to supplicate more sincerely for God's favour.⁵⁰

This way of regaining the lost favor of God truly reflects the spirit of Ethiopian religiosity.

Predictably, the attitude of the Ethiopians to natural disasters is, for many scholars, overcharged with fatalism. Thus, Marcus' comment on Menelik's proclamation says: "The disaster was aggravated by the fatalistic belief that if the Almighty wanted to save the situation, he would do so."⁵¹ For Clapham too, the Ethiopian reaction against disasters is impregnated with "heavy fatalism."⁵² Dessalegn reveals the same understanding when he suggests that poverty and disaster are for the Ethiopians "ordained by fate."⁵³

The problem with this notion of Ethiopian fatalism is its dissonance with the character of a nation supposedly obstinate in the defense of its independence, even when situations look desperate. Are the victory of Adwa and the resistance of the patriots during the Italian occupation (to mention but recent events) the acts of a people racked by fatalism? Could other cases of national resistance be cited in dire situations? It is contradictory to admire the survival power of a people while charging it with fatalism.

The hitch comes from the confusion of fatalism with religious clientelism. Fatalism is a state of mind which, because it perceives events as ineluctable, advises passive acceptance. One is born with good fortune or not, and there is nothing that a hapless person can do to change his/her fate, except perhaps to hope for a better life in another world. Such is not the Ethiopians' understanding of fate. Not that they do not believe in fate, but rather that their conception of fate is essentially mobile and shifting. It is the recasting of destiny rather than its ineluctability that captivates the Ethiopians. And there is no contradiction in the notion of shifting destiny as long as it is placed in the context of clientelism. While what comes from God is always fate, God's absolute free will—the only way by which an

Ethiopian thinks of expressing the infinite power of God—changes fate into a shifting allotment. So the person who has lost the favor of God can hope to regain it. Since sins against His benefactor caused the loss of favor, prayers and supplications can retrieve grace. Likewise, a hapless person can be among the elect if submission to God and patience are his/her guiding principles. The disposition particularly encouraged by the Ethiopians is certainly hope (*tesfa*), which is in any case a Christian attitude.

Whereas some scholars reduce Ethiopian religiosity to fatalism, others follow Perham, who said that the life of the Ethiopians is "pervaded by religion without being really spiritual."⁵⁴ The alleged deficiency of asceticism and intellectualism must have inspired Perham's comment. This accusation is exaggerated, at any rate it cannot apply to the monastic clergy, whose asceticism was proverbial. But here again Eurocentrism prevents the perception of a different type of spirituality.

Western religiosity is suffused with the need to be worthy of God. The purpose of asceticism in that tradition is to evince the degree of mastery that human beings can achieve over their sensuous nature, and thus to merit God's love. Given the assumption that nature, cursed with evilness, appears in human beings in the form of desire and concupiscence, to succumb to pleasure is to transgress divine commandments as well as to lose, so to speak, God's esteem. None of these components are part of Ethiopian religiosity.

Though as any Christian people the Ethiopians believe in the reality of original sin, yet they do not think that sensuous life is a sin, something unpleasant to God. In this respect, Zera Yaqob the thinker was a perfect interpreter of the Ethiopian vision of sin and nature. In his view, nature is not corrupt and evil, and pleasure is good. He writes: "Do not listen to the fools who say each day: 'This or that is not good; it would have been better if it had not been created'. All that God has created is very good in the way he created it."⁵⁵ The moral conclusion of this judgment is eudaemonism, the attribution of "an immanent value to all the joys of this life."⁵⁶ This radical eudaemonism brought Zera Yaqob to condemn fasting and monastic life, placing him at the antipodes of Ethiopian Christianity. Apart from the central place accorded to prayer, none of the other practices of Ethiopian Christianity finds favor with him.

Why, then, do I take him as a representative of Ethiopian thinking? Let us try to see where exactly lies the divergence between him and the

average Ethiopian. Ethiopians advocate ascetic life no more than Zera Yaqob, as if nature were cursed and pleasure bad. Fasting, prayer, and supplication have one essential function: to curb *tigab*. So much is this the case that fasting, however widespread and protracted, always preserves an intermittent character. A period of fasting begets a period of repleteness and leniency. Obviously, the latter are not considered sins. Since only the danger of continuous satiety is feared, it should be interrupted by periodic fasts. This practice has therefore no resemblance to the repression of desires in the Western sense of the word. Its purpose is to prevent the rise of arrogance, not to deprive oneself of pleasure. Still less is the aim to suffer so as to sublimate desires by hard work and achievement. The cycle of deprivation and enjoyment rather than a permanent repression defines the Ethiopian attitude. As Donald Crummey emphasized,

through its schedule of feasts and fasts, the Church moulded the cycle of life throughout the Christian highlands. Through feast days, the saints and the Blessed Virgin became real; through fasts, atonement and repentance were expressed.⁵⁷

Had the Ethiopians been convinced of the evilness of nature and pleasure, the alternation of enjoyment with deprivation could hardly become the expression of their religiosity. The purpose of the alternation is not difficult to grasp, either. It sustains clientelism: one does not refuse pleasure because it is a sin, but because deprivation is designed to please God, to show submission, to calm His wrath, and to obtain His favor. As Zera Yaqob thought, neither nature nor pleasure is evil in itself: disobedience alone is evil. The function of deprivation turns enjoyment into celebration and reconciliation. So conceived, enjoyment is sought after with great innocence, contrasting with the sense of guilt with which the Western pursuit of enjoyment is tainted. The cycle of feasts and restraints controls *tigab* by coercing it into an ephemeral mode of existence. This revolving existence is never oblivious of the Almighty, since its to-and-fro movement rings like a bell. Plowden's statement according to which "the strong prejudices of the Abyssinians on the subject of fasting, and the power it gives to the priesthood, are something extraordinary,"⁵⁸ ceases to be surprising when we understand how thoroughly fasting embodies the spirit of Ethiopian Christianity.

Take, for instance, prayer. Its special meaning to the Ethiopians will appear if we try to know why Zera Yaqob, who rejected fasting and asceti-

cism, bestowed on it the honor of pre-eminence. "As regards prayer," he advised, "we should always pray to God our creator so that we may get what is necessary for our lives, and that he grant us science and wisdom that we may render our work good."⁵⁹ Alluding to the objection of those who find prayer irrelevant on the grounds that "God knows all our needs," Zera Yaqob's reply is:

I say to them: 'Prayer is not meant to remind God of our needs, which he knows better than we do; but prayer is meant to make us worthy of receiving God's favour, and to know from whom we receive what is necessary for our life, and realize that everything is from the Lord our God, and that we express our gratitude to him, praise him, and always be near him in our thought and praise'.⁶⁰

In a word, prayer is the only answer to the one question which matters: Who is the master? As such, it expresses gratitude, humility, and submission, and so sustains religious clientelism by stifling *tigab*. Prayer comes first because, before being a means of obtaining favors, it inculcates in human beings the notion of absolute dependence. In this sense, prayer precedes the belief in God. It is not a calculation designed to extort something from God, either. Being utter submission, it expects little: it bows and accepts whatever the Almighty decides. For, adds Heruy Wolde Selassie, "whether good or evil, what God wishes for you will not fail to happen in due course."⁶¹ So that, in whatever situation a person is, the only correct attitude towards God is always submission and gratitude. Above all, do not try to control your destiny: pray and simply rely on God's mercy.

Now is this not fatalism? It would have been so, were not an important factor intervening, namely the notion of justice. The notion deserves clarification, particularly as Ethiopian scholars regard justice as an Ethiopian passion. For example, of the four cardinal characteristics by which an Ethiopian author defines the Ethiopian value system (namely, religiosity, attachment to land, and respect for social hierarchy⁶²), "justice comes into the lead," for "injustice makes the Ethiopian extremely unhappy."⁶³ Western students of Ethiopia do not attach so much importance to justice, a surprising oversight given the admitted passion of the Ethiopians for litigation. There is perhaps an explanation: arbitrary rules were so endemic in Ethiopia that, in the eyes of Western scholars, nothing was as far removed from Ethiopian society as the notion of justice.

However, if litigation is a national passion, if therefore an Ethiopian does not feel quite himself/herself unless he/she takes somebody to court, the concern for justice should be closely scrutinized. One thing is sure: the modern meaning of equality before the law is not what the Ethiopians have in mind when they speak of justice. In fact, the high respect for social hierarchy empties justice of the notion of equality. Nonetheless, the ranking of justice above all the other virtues may mean that it contains them all. Even religiosity may be a manifestation of justice. The riddle is solved if the whole thinking is referred to clientelism. God is expected to be just in the sense of rewarding those who obey and worship Him. Not that God is subject to the law of justice—God knows no law—but because those who obey should be in favor with Him. Rewards should be bestowed on them, not for their merits, but for their submission, for their acceptance of the role of God's servants. Divine justice does not therefore implicate equal treatment; rather, it leans towards favoritism, especially for those chosen by God Himself.

Now we understand why justice is a primordial concern and why injustice makes the Ethiopian unhappy. Even secularly speaking, the Ethiopians are extremely distressed by masters who do not reward services, who monopolize everything for themselves and ignore their servants. The master is not expected to be beneficent out of gratitude; such an expectation would inverse the hierarchy. The master should be beneficent for the sake of justice, in the name of clientship. That is why masters who refuse to reward (as well as those who are not brave and daring enough) are finally betrayed and abandoned. All are unjust by failing to reward, the first because they take everything for themselves, the second because they have nothing to offer though claiming to be masters. The Ethiopian sense of justice is thus very close to generosity (*legesna*, *chrota*): the master is not obliged to do something; instead, he/she is expected to be generous. More often than not, the Ethiopians praise God by using such terms as benevolent, generous, kind. The important place of justice—in the Ethiopian sense of generosity—is therefore quite natural when we see how closely it reflects the very spirit of patron-client relationships.

But are there no cases when the Ethiopians plead for what they believe to be just in the sense of asserting their right? Certainly such cases are plentiful, but in no way are they identical with patron-client relationships, which are valued chiefly. Moreover, when an Ethiopian sues a highly placed person, he/she is no longer a client of said person; in fact, the litigant has

already become the client of somebody else whose protection he/she enjoys. The spirit of equality with which a peasant can argue with a noble in court, as reported by Plowden, is an equality rendered possible by clientelism. In reality, two patrons squabble through the media of their protégés.

Let us transpose this secular practice to the religious plane. The importance of saints and angels, the hierarchy according to which the Ethiopians rank them, the choice of a patron saint, all reverberate with the same spirit. Chief among the religious concerns of the Ethiopians is how they can become the clients of saints whom they believe to be powerful and sensitive to their prayers and supplications. The intercession of saints and angels is essential to the faith because it facilitates God's favor, and thus is a key element in the structure of spiritual clientship. Especially, no influence on God is as strong as the intervention of the mother of intercession: the Virgin Mary.

What has been said so far demonstrates how systematically the idea of justice shields Ethiopian religiosity from fatalism. Thanks to justice, nothing is decided once and for all, and neither decline nor ascent is irreversible. The grace which distributes different and unequal destinies to individuals is extremely unstable and shifting. The belief is thus imbued less with the idea of fatalism than with the idea of changing destinies. At first look, destinies do not appear intelligible and fair. Even evil persons can be successful where good ones fail. Precisely, warns Heruy, "do not say that God is unjust,"⁶⁴ for "if you are good you will rise up again." Likewise, "do not be too happy because you have been promoted, for if you are evil, you will be demoted."⁶⁵ Too much happiness will breed *tigab*, entailing the shattering of client relationships. Since the favor removed from one person goes to another person, there is no cause for despair, either.

The Ethiopians, it follows, do not define good and evil in such a way that the two qualities exclude each other. The Western question of how God, a perfect Being, could create evil is unknown to the Ethiopians. So perplexed was the West that it became tempted by nothing less than materialism. However much philosophers like Leibniz wrestled to reconcile God's perfection with the existence of evil by assuring that "God acts always in the most perfect and desirable way possible,"⁶⁶ no theory has ever succeeded in salving the anxiety. The Ethiopians were protected against this harrowing interrogation by a kind of dialectical conception of good and evil. For them, the world was created no so much to pamper human

beings as to bear witness of the triumph of God's will. God's creation of the world was inspired neither by the need to please human beings nor to harm them. All created things, including human beings, are instruments of the objectification and self-assertion of God. In the final analysis, justice governs the world in the precise sense that God's will always prevails. This triumph presupposes and posits evil so that the world is like a stage where the tendency to self-sufficiency and arrogance rises constantly against the will of the Creator. The unfolding reality is the perpetual victory of the Creator, the story of the defeat and submission of the creature. So, evil is a necessary actor in this divine drama and, as such, part of good. Just as a novelist creates evil characters in order to highlight the triumph of the hero in the end, so too God creates good and evil for the purpose of asserting His will.

While believing that God is the cause of everything, Western thinking attempted to reduce the contradiction stemming from the existence of evil by the acceptance of dualism. By attributing autonomy to the created world and freedom to human beings, it conceived of the possibility of removing from God the exclusive authorship of evil. For the Ethiopians, this solution begets a bigger contradiction, to wit the necessity of fixing limits to the Almighty. Since everything proceeds from God, evil cannot be an exception. What is crucial is not the existence of evil, but the inevitable submission of everything to God. The meaning of existence is to give evidence of this infinite and active power of God. Hence the need for a dialectical, dramatic conception of good and evil. I prefer to call it dramatic because the dialectical conception, as defined by Hegel, resolves the contradiction by the progressive triumph of good over evil, which is then progress. As we saw, the Ethiopian thinking is rather Heraclitean: not progress, but reversals, or rise and fall control the world. The triumph of God is best expressed by the rise and fall of things, since they give evidence of their nothingness. The appropriate form of divine triumph is thus not progress, but recurrence, which puts rhythm into the perpetual, cyclical rise and submission of arrogance.

In closing, the definition of Ethiopian religiosity by religious clientelism is a fair characterization. It explains why, to the great surprise of the world, the Ethiopians so serenely thought themselves to be the elect of God. Scholars ascribe this opinion to the influence of Judaism. Yet the influence would not have borne fruit were it not planted in a fertile ground. Assuredly, religious clientelism can incline a people to consider itself as the

chosen people. One may object by saying that all peoples have more or less the same feeling. Granted, all the more easily that it cannot be otherwise. However, no nation, perhaps with the exception of Israel, has so sincerely and naively believed in the idea of election as the Ethiopians. Because the religious belief, the sociopolitical system, and the values echoed in concert the idea of election, its impact was naturally greater than elsewhere.

More importantly, this impact had direct bearing on the survival of Ethiopia. The long resistance of Ethiopia amid hostile forces is due, so the Ethiopians believe, to the special protection and care bestowed on Ethiopia by God. Conversely, when disaster or defeat occurs, the Ethiopians are quick to construe it as punishment caused by God's disappointment. Prayer, supplication, and fasting are then the appropriate means to revive God's favor. This revival, in turn, heralds the inevitable victory of Ethiopia. In his book, *Abyssinian Patchwork*, Kenneth Gandar Dower reproduces a poem composed to salute the return of Emperor Haile Selassie after the five years of Italian occupation. Here is what it says:

Ethiopian people were led in mass to be butchered
 And the whole country was turned into butchery . . .
 Our enemies have laughed at us with scorn
 The enemy had come and conquered Ethiopia
 And punished the people as it is ordered by God,
 He was expelled, having executed his order, because God
 said 'Enough!'. . .
 Now God with his limitless forgiveness
 Gave to those he created his pardon . . .
 Your prayer was heard
 And grace given to you
 To renew your historic name . . .
 So the innocent blood of your people has not been left unavenged
 And God has testified that justice is on your side.⁶⁷

All the ingredients of Ethiopian religiosity and meaning of life are gathered in this poem. Disaster is punishment due to the loss of God's grace and expiation helps to regain it. So God is just in the sense that He favors those He has chosen. The misfortune of the Italians comes from their desire to subdue God's favorite nation. So they were driven out after having been used to teach it a lesson.

The identification of survival with divine prescription inculcates an unbending power of resistance. So long as nothing is done to disappoint God, the favorite of God can never be under the yoke of an invader. Even if this happens, the reconciliation with God is enough to bring about the inevitable victory of Ethiopia. Under these conditions, should we be surprised if "in matter of profession, no nation is more loudly Christian than the Abyssinians"?⁶⁸ Christianity was not a mere belief; it was identified with the instinct of survival. So was the Church whose power provided the warrant for survival. The idea of being God's favorite was so firmly fixed in the mind of the Ethiopians that, as Plowden remarked, it has prevented them from changing and learning from other nations. However, Plowden continues,

while the Abyssinians are thus incapable, yet, once vanquish their idea that they are perfect, that they are the favoured people of the earth, and that nothing can be taught them, and they will be quick and intelligent to learn and imitate.⁶⁹

Plowden's wish was accomplished by modernization, except that the Ethiopians did not learn and imitate. On the contrary, decline and underdevelopment became their lot, as though to demonstrate that no nation can ever develop if its basic personality is shattered.

Idil

We have tried to define the spirit of Ethiopian Christianity in the hope of deducing from it the Ethiopian conception of reality, human beings and their place in the world—in a word, what is commonly called philosophy. This procedure is justified because "Ethiopian philosophy," entirely engulfed in religion, never became (perhaps with the exception of Zera Yaqob) an autonomous object of rational thinking. It was necessary to disentangle the philosophical elements from the religious shell before assembling the philosophical outlook. Once this work is done, we get to the spirit of the conception. Spirit means essentially the supervenient element making each character and phenomenon Ethiopian, that which imparts to the whole sociocultural system a specific Ethiopian flavor, even when borrowed beliefs and practices are involved. Following Honorat Aguessy, we shall say on the one hand that no culture develops in isolation, on the other that

the authenticity of a culture is not situated at the level of the matter or materials on which the spirit works, but at the level of the particular style that it adopts in order to carve or qualify these materials and effect a synthesis.⁷⁰

To my mind, the particular style which informs and authenticates all aspects of Ethiopian life is the notion of *idil*. It has overtly appeared in the religious belief itself, in what we have called religious clientelism. God relates to human beings by the favor or disfavor which He bestows on them. The whole purpose of the Ethiopian religious life is to gain the favor or to maintain it by prayers, fasts, supplications, and intermediaries. Since the Ethiopian considers essentially unreligious the claim of any merit before God, the favor obtained from Him is always unmerited blessing. It is grace pure and simple, and not something which we ought to have. The notion of *idil* is set out to express this aspect of the religious life.

Scholars have noted how important the idea of *idil* is for the Ethiopians. But, as mentioned earlier, most of them did not vest it with any meaning other than the usual belief in fatalism. Yet they had many opportunities to qualify the idea a bit more, given that the Ethiopians invoke the word *idil* to express various situations. It is doubtless related to fatalism, since it serves to indicate the inevitable. Even so, however, it means not so much necessity as chance. For an Ethiopian, an event can be inescapable without being determined; specifically, its inevitability is due to its being an occurrence rather than a determined outcome. The Ethiopian calls this chance, whether the event is good or bad.

But this is not all that there is to be said. The Ethiopian uses also the term *idil* to express opportunity, in the sense that it should be sought. Not only is chance conditioning people, it is also a pursuit, an ideal. Most of all, the Ethiopian is extremely sensitive to the fleeting nature of *idil*, to the reversal of fortunes, so that the notion never signifies a definitive state of things. *Idil* is highly volatile and likes to manifest itself by reversals. As though the amount of *idil* in the world were constant, more *idil* here means less everywhere else. To me, this character of *idil* comes up against the attempt to equate it with fatalism. Levine, however, notes that the Amhara invoke *idil* "to account for the ups and downs of their lives," that is, "to signify the working of God's will insofar as it affects human purposes, and is to be regarded as more important than human effort in attaining one's goals."⁷¹ He draws the conclusion that "the peasant is discouraged from determined efforts to make changes in his environment because of the

feeling that no matter what he does, God's disposition is what really counts."⁷² But why should the peasant pander to fatalism while knowing the flexibility of God's disposition, especially to those who obey Him? The ups and downs in the lives of individuals are possible because obedience entails reward and defiance punishment. All religious teachings, including Western ones, do assert that acting according to God's rules is the best way to obtain His blessings, even for worldly pursuits.

To gain a better idea of the Ethiopian notion of fate, let us try to clarify it by means of relevant comparisons. For instance, in what sense does the Ethiopian idea of fate differ from the Protestant notion of predestination? The question is interesting if for no other reason than because it invalidates the equation of the belief in fate with fatalism. Believing that everything is determined by a supernatural being is not tantamount to saying that one should be passive. More often than not, predestination creates an anxiety propelling one towards an active life. This was the historic effect of the belief in predestination on the Protestants. The question of knowing whether one is the elect of God has induced the followers of Protestantism to look for signs of election in works, especially in the accumulation of wealth. As Talcott Parsons puts it, "good works, while they could not influence salvation, could be interpreted as *signs* of grace."⁷³ By thus vesting accumulation of wealth with the meaning of validating election, this religious drive has strongly inspired the establishment of capitalism.

The Ethiopian notion of fate reasons in terms of election; yet it does not follow the Protestant logic. There is election, divine favor, but unlike Protestantism this election is not decided once and for all. Favor is given as much as it can be withdrawn. The fleeting sense of destiny makes the Ethiopian notion of fate very un-Protestant. Nonetheless there is anxiety: like the Protestant, the Ethiopian is deeply preoccupied with the question of his/her destiny. Why, then, did the Ethiopians never develop the same urge to achievement? The volatile nature of fate on the one hand, the vanity of merit before God on the other, combined to produce a client mentality rather than an achieving one. Since one cannot impress God by achievements, what else is left wherewith to solicit His blessing but adulation and deference? Hence the paramount importance of prayer, fasting, and intercession. Quite logically, the Protestant knows no intercession, while the Ethiopian, convinced of the fluctuating nature of fate, has no other drive than to remain among the chosen or to join them each time the die is cast anew.

Viewed from this angle, a parallel between the Ethiopian sense of destiny and that of Hinduism becomes tempting. In spite of the wide difference between Hinduism and Ethiopian religion, they have in common the belief in the recasting of destiny. The Hindu doctrine of rebirth assumes that "one could improve one's position in life in the future . . . by accumulating merit. Such merit could be attained by charitable giving. . . , but above all by good deeds."⁷⁴ Granted that the idea of reincarnation is unknown in Ethiopia, granted that accumulation of merit is not vested with predictable effects, granted all of this and more, the fact remains that in both cases destiny is liable to revision. Both agree that destiny is not simply unfolding, but disagree on the point at which recastings occur. For Hinduism, they occur in future lives; for the Ethiopian they can happen during the same life, in any one of a number of intermittent moments of reallocation.

It is essential to understand that the Ethiopian notion of changing fate is not the result of an opportunist mentality. It springs rather from the deep belief of Ethiopian spirituality, from the failure to understand why, God being so powerful, there must be something definitive, unchanging. As far as the Ethiopians are concerned, the belief in ineluctable destiny takes the wrong road, since everything in the world can be altered by God. Accordingly, it must be possible to supplicate efficiently.

This notion of shifting fate is also where the Ethiopian understanding of destiny diverges from the broad African approach. In the first place, the deep African similarity between the two conceptions is most striking. The notion of fate is so typical of African mentality that the Ethiopian emphasis confirms the extent to which Christian beliefs have been implanted in an African soil. Inversely, the difference between the two conceptions highlights the particularity of the Ethiopian style. The African thinking identifies destiny with the idea of mission assigned to each person. This view, notes Abraham,

was simply consonant with their [Africans] idea of the perfectly integrated and cohesive society in which men have a place somewhat comparable to the parts of a machine. Their place is appointed in it, and in that place they function for the total harmony and well-being.⁷⁵

Clearly, the African notion of destiny is, fundamentally, a way of strengthening African communalism. Destiny is a place, a function in society, and

works for the benefit and well-being of the whole. It harnesses individuals to society by inserting them organically into a system functioning according to the logic of the whole.

Such, however, could not be the Ethiopian conception of destiny. In a class-structured society, destiny was bound to assume a hierarchical rather than a communal meaning. It had to denote different ranks, unequal placements, the possibility of special favor, of fortune and misfortune. More than harmony, it had to emphasize competition, putting on the sense of election, of discrepant lots, and distinguishing the individual from the community. In thus acting as a ranking force, it was exposed to vicissitudes. Being grace which creates inequality, and not a plan enforcing communalism, no wonder its protruding feature makes it vulnerable. Ethiopian individualism, however assertive, never reached self-sufficiency. Produced by *idil*, it softened communal ties by extricating the individual from society. In so doing, it made the individual even more dependent on the dispenser of benefits.

By and large, nothing better explains the Ethiopian concept of fate than the ethical problems to which it gives rise. The Ethiopians, we remarked, are particularly anxious to know their fate. What could be the deep reason for this anxiety if not that they must be careful to not overstep (or "understep") their allotted bounds? The ethical problem arises therefore from the obligation incumbent upon each individual to be in his/her proper, due place. When the place occupied by each individual corresponds to allotment, the Ethiopian is willing to speak of a just social order. Many rationales are offered in support of this ethics of the right place.

For the Ethiopians, the source of all vices is, we said, *tigab* or arrogance. As denial of human dependence, it is highly offending against God and invariably brings disaster. People transgress divine orders, the Ethiopian is convinced, when they no longer take God as the only master. Sin is therefore not so much weakness as rebellion caused by arrogance. The less individuals are in their proper place, the more frequent transgressions become. When individuals have no idea of their right place—worse yet, when they occupy undeserved places—they are inevitably dragged towards arrogance. In thus going beyond their *idil*, they disturb the order emanating from divine apportionment. Consequently, the moral rule should posit the knowledge of one's proper place as a *sine qua non* for avoiding *tigab*.

Tigab is, according to Levine, a tendency towards "aggression" and "insubordinate behavior."⁷⁶ Recognizing and accepting one's proper place

is then how one can appease aggression and shun insubordinate behavior. When individuals live according to their allotment, they are bound to be sociable, prone as they are to know their rights but also their limits. "Too much satisfaction"⁷⁷ breeds overestimation of one's capacity, and hence causes *tigab*. In fact, the person who demands more than his/her right place is the prey of *tigab* even more gravely than the person who is simply satiated. In this case, *tigab* amounts to unfitness and usurpation, confirming that the ethics of the right place alone is consonant with divine order.

Underestimation is condemned as much as overestimation is discouraged. Insofar as the concept of the proper place reserves for each person an allotted place or rank, not to strive to reach one's proper place is to displease God by being in collusion with the destroyers of the right order. This attitude is for the Ethiopian no different from cowardice and invites punishments. To let someone else take your place, to consent to usurpation (*medefer*), is to lower yourself in a way that impedes the right order, even in the larger community.

Just as prayer and fasting were designed to temper *tigab*, so had the Ethiopians contrived a whole system of education to inculcate ambition and daring. Already, at the level of child-rearing, the notion of honor is deciphered in terms of being in one's right place. Since God's ways and choices are mysterious, no child can foresee his future position. In view of this indeterminacy, what parents can do is to prepare their offspring for the better by teaching them to have ambition and guts. They do this through an upbringing impelling the child "to stand on his own, to assert his rights, and to exhibit bravery or goodness (*gwebez*)."⁷⁸

Given the decisive role of warlike values in social promotion, it should come as no surprise that the inculcation of manliness dominated the method of child-rearing. The typical Ethiopian, says Mahteme Selassie, is the product of a system of education tending "to make him a skilful and courageous warrior and exemplary civilian chief."⁷⁹ Physical education was almost entirely devoted to the development of warlike aptitude and the learning of the manipulation of weapons. Even children's games were so designed as "to facilitate . . . competition."⁸⁰ Most of them consisted of violent physical and verbal confrontations, always ending with winners and losers.⁸¹ To tell the truth, most of these games were not forms of entertainment or diversion, but methods of fostering the spirit of competition and aggressiveness.

Only when we place the Ethiopian child-rearing system under the norm of the right place can we overcome the dilemma in which most scholars find themselves. On the one hand, these scholars note the insistence on teaching the child the respect of authority and the control of aggressiveness, on the other they observe an equal tendency to inculcate self-assertiveness and aggression. So untied, the two tendencies stand as contradictory. But consider them in the light of the obligation of legitimate place, and they will appear as the two sides of the same coin. The right place requires self-assertiveness, competition, and force if necessary to obtain it. It is also knowing one's limit, thus implying respect for those who are better placed. Unless the two aspects are balanced, either aggressiveness will lead to *tigab* or cowardice to demission. In both cases, the concept of the right place is upset.

The ethics of the right place explains many aspects of Ethiopian mentality. It provides the canon according to which an Ethiopian used to judge whether a social order is right or wrong. The hierarchial order was all the more accepted the more it was believed to apportion the proper place to each person. A different belief begot, if not open rebellions, at least complicated and unhealthy relationships between superiors and subordinates. When subordinates were convinced that their superiors were not in the right place, they tended to develop contempt (*niket*), whatever be the origins of the superiors. For an Ethiopian, the confusion of places in the hierarchy was highly painful, harboring as it was the feeling of being the victim of injustice. Especially in times of war, when the leader does not show enough courage and ability to win the war, the contempt is such that, as we saw, defection becomes imminent, some even joining the other side.

Scholars are right about the centrality of authority in Ethiopia, provided they add that the order must reflect the hierarchy of fate. When individuals are in the places allotted to them by God, then the order is just and full of promise. Authority is simply the political, secular translation of the metaphysics of *idil*. The right order will inspire either profound deference or incite defiance, according to the degree that it is either realized or not realized. The Ethiopian fighting spirit, we noted, resided in the authoritarian links between leaders and followers. Because of this, the death of the leader often caused anarchy and dispersion. Now we know why it has been so. The Ethiopians will follow proven leaders, those favored by fortune, to hell and back. Such leaders can ask anything and they will be promptly obeyed because of their followers' conviction of the existence of a

metaphysical fitness, harmony between themselves and the leaders. Just as for Leibniz harmony created the best of all possible worlds, for the Ethiopian the right hierarchical combination of people produces the best of all possible social orders.

The parallel with Leibniz can be pursued further, since the notion of *idil* transforms each person into a monad and society into a hierarchy of monads. As monads "have in themselves a certain perfection" and "a sufficiency that makes them the sources of their internal actions,"⁸² each person also has his/her allotted destiny which is fully realized only in the context of harmony, in the just hierarchical combination. If *idil* is revealed and realized in the appropriate hierarchical coupling, then the hierarchy between compatible persons creates the best opportunity for all. Individuals may miss their destiny because of a bad combination or an ill-fated patronage. This belief persuades the Ethiopians to associate the search for their due place with the right patronage. Everything appears as though God, after having endowed each person with a specific destiny, left the responsibility of its proper realization to the individual. This freedom of choice is necessary to evince the omnipotence of God, it being understood that failure to comply with the harmony prescribed by God inevitably brings about setbacks and disasters.

This freedom of choice deserves our undivided attention. For example, how is one to reconcile the following observations of Levine? "Within the segments of superior-subordinate relations," asserts Levine, "domination is virtually unlimited."⁸³ Yet,

the Amhara soldier felt he was fighting for a lord by his own free will and, therefore, had every right to leave him when conditions justified a move. One such condition was when the lord did not reward his followers liberally enough. Another related condition was when the lord had a tendency to suffer defeat in battle.⁸⁴

The answer to the question of knowing how this shift from total deference to betrayal is possible will remain difficult unless the importance of the right combination in the pursuit of *idil* is underlined. The follower is psychologically and morally under the authority of the leader so long as the spell of the right mixture works. In that case, the destinies of the leader and follower are identified to the point of rendering them, in effect, a single person. Reversals dismiss this hypnotic state. Thereafter, a gap exists between their destinies, the very one enabling the follower to recover

his/her freedom. What united them was not so much opportunism as the sense of a pre-established metaphysical harmony. When this harmony is disproved, the follower ceases to feel obliged to serve a master who does not assist in the hatching of his/her *idil*.

A consequence of the ethics of legitimate place is the Ethiopian appalling fear of derision (*messakiya*, *messalekiya*). David and Francis Korten, in their study of the Ethiopian character, ascribe the fear of open or implicit public criticism to the existence of a strong social pressure for conformity: "These pressures for conformity and concern for what others will think or say are a primary means for social control in the society."⁸⁵ The authors cite as examples the fear of shame (*newr*, *hafret*), the condemnation of precipitation (*chikola*), the excessive concern for public opinion (*yilunta*). No doubt, these feelings exert social control, but the question is to know how they proceed. Let us see whether said pressure is not the injunction to act in accordance with one's place. Precipitation is obviously lacking in the knowledge of one's legitimate place and real capacity. So, too, is excessive concern about public opinion, since derision attacks those individuals who overestimate themselves or do not behave according to their rank. In this last case, the appropriate expression is shame, for it is peculiar to individuals who debase or lower themselves.

So organically is the Ethiopian notion of shame tied up with the idea of rank that external observers were misled into believing that "they [the Ethiopians] do not know what shame means."⁸⁶ Yet others have observed how pervasive the fear of shame is: "Children are taught to avoid being shamed. To be shamed reflects upon a man's honor and masculinity and to a certain extent on his entire family,"⁸⁷ assures Lipsky. The discrepancy between these observations vanishes as soon as we understand that shame, though pervasive, is yet relative, even positional. What is shameful for one person is not necessarily so for another. It depends on one's place; there is shame when one does not behave according to one's status. Cowardice brings disgrace on a soldier, still more on a lord, less so on a merchant or a craftsman. Avarice shames a lord, but not a poor person. Shame and derision punish less the violation of social conformity than the discrepancy between persons and the places they occupy, as if implying that they are not in their proper place.

Equally illustrative of the notion of *idil* is the Ethiopian conception of time and space. Let me begin with time (*gize*). The Ethiopian conception of time is different from the Western understanding. Time is not a flow, a

continuity, or as Bergson says, "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances."⁸⁸ Sensitivity to reversals and occurrence prevents the Ethiopians from thinking in terms of continuity and progression, from conceiving of the future as the product of the past. Still less is time, to use Kant's expression, "a subjective condition of our intuition,"⁸⁹ such that we can think of time without any event filling it. For the Ethiopian, the event itself is time or produced by time. Event and time are inseparable, both being equally discontinuous. In a word, time is destiny itself, fate at work, doing and undoing the world. Quite rightly Levine writes: "Time for the Amhara is thus not a morally indifferent and qualitatively undifferentiated continuum. It is a series of occasions with more or less sacred significance."⁹⁰

This character of time chiefly expresses the vulnerability, the precariousness of things. It follows that time is not a cumulative process, augmenting by itself, acquiring consistency, and going somewhere, to some future, by some inner dynamism. Instead, time is the happening of reversals, of ups and downs in a cyclical fashion. Neither does time pursue finality in an unfolding, progressive manner, as visualized by Hegel. Excess, birth, fortune here mean shortage, death, misfortune elsewhere. Discriminatory and not appropriate for all at a given moment, it operates according to the unity of opposites, making and unmaking the world without leading it to some progress or a better situation. As such, its sole purpose is to manifest the power of God, and it does so by substituting recast for progression.

As suggested earlier, Heraclitus's thinking has certain affinities with the Ethiopian conception. The vulnerability of things and reversal of events have been strongly expressed by the Heraclitean notion of cycle based on the unity and struggle of opposites. Points of similarity are also observed between the Ethiopian conception and the thinking of Anaximander, who conceived of becoming as the way things "pay penalty and retribution to each other for their injustice according to the assessment of Time."⁹¹ This idea of justice arbitrating struggles tallies with the Ethiopian notion of reward and punishment. For the Ethiopians, the existence of an avenging justice grades patience (*tigist*) among the cardinal virtues. Patience leans both on the precariousness of things and on faith in God's justice. No possession is definitively acquired, and evil and good works always end up by obtaining what they deserve. However, justice does not mete out rewards

and punishments in a progressive, cumulative manner, but abruptly, through jerky rulings.

This notion of time agrees perfectly with the Ethiopian conception of the divine. The recurrent cycle and the ups and downs are the way in which reality is kept in existence in such a way that it manifests the triumph of God's will. Being the power of birth and dissolution, time is the exclusive weapon of God. It would have been progressive, were its purpose the self-realization of God. But this idea of God's self-realization, as conceptualized by Hegel, for instance, is highly repugnant. A destiny, even though unfolding in a necessary fashion, is ascribed to God. For the Ethiopian, God is asserting Himself, not through the development of the world, but through its nothingness and dissolution, that is by His power to do and undo phenomena as He pleases. Things are thus fated and controlled; they are neither things-in-themselves nor necessary moments in the process of God's becoming. The Ethiopian notion of destiny is clearly far removed from the Western conception. While for the West destiny is expressed by necessity, by the fact of being bound to happen, for the Ethiopian it is exactly the absence of necessity. Destiny epitomizes the fleeting nature of things, the hanging of their being and becoming on divine freak, so to speak. It is the stamp of ephemerality, the expression of utter dependence, almost equal to that of puppets.

But does not this sense of being ephemeral contradict the strong instinct of survival that this study had so far accorded to the Ethiopians? Here appears the full meaning of the Ethiopian belief in election. In thinking themselves the favorite of God, the Ethiopians compel the ephemerality of the world to earmark an exception. To the vision equating time with havoc and uncontrolled flood, the myth of the *Kibre Negest* opposes the image of a people who, like Noah in times past, is graced with a boat saving it from the flood of time. The boat is none other than the messianic assignment, the guardianship of the true faith conferred upon Ethiopia by the Almighty. While empires rise and fall and new heretical beliefs inundate the world, only the nation chosen to bear witness to the true religion escapes vicissitudes. In thus conceiving Ethiopia as an island protected from the wrath of God by its special status, the Ethiopians were interpreting their survival in terms of fate, as the outcome of God's will.

As with time, so too is the Ethiopian conception of space related to power and order. While time is doing and undoing things, space is ordering ephemerality according to rank. Unlike Western thinking, space is

therefore not abstract. The West willingly conceives of space as an indifferent order by which we perceive things as outside us and external to each other. It is, to quote Kant, "the form of all phenomena of the external sense, that is, the subjective condition of the sensibility."⁹² Neither is space the order of magnitude in the sense of Bergson, who reduces space to "juxtaposition."⁹³ In both cases, each point being external to all others, space is by definition infinitely and arbitrarily divisible. Nowhere do we find a privileged point, a center in relation to which things are ordered. By contrast, the organization of people and objects around privileged points is what strikes the Ethiopian. The very order of the geographical space organized by mountains and valleys is a powerful suggestion of hierarchical space. Space is therefore determined by the need to rank, by the sense of hierarchical order. The Ethiopian word for space is *bota*, that is, "place"; more than extension or externality the notion designates arrangement and interlocking. A place is not an indifferent perspective; it is a qualitatively distinct allotment arranged according to center-periphery polarization.

In this way, each person is in a place which he/she considers central. But no sooner does the person think so than the place becomes the periphery of another center and so on and so forth. Levine is right when he detects a sociological meaning in the Ethiopian interpretation of space: just as "concentric circles" make up the organization of space, "the pattern of a charged center surrounded by circles of decreasing significance recurs in the main areas of Amhara life."⁹⁴ Since the places where people are indicate their position in the social hierarchy, space is not a relative juxtaposition, but the ranking of fate, the visible image of the interlocking of smaller space with wider space, of subordinates with superiors. The widest space on earth belongs to the emperor. However, it is itself a periphery of Heaven, characteristically called by the Ethiopians "the government of Heaven" (*mengiste semayat*).

The relation of space and time to *idil* thus elucidated, there remains the question of knowing how exactly political and socioeconomic institutions were making room for fate. Obviously, the political organization of the society, by its very reluctance to recognize hereditary entitlement, was incarnating the Ethiopian idea of fate. Deprived of inheritance, the whole political system appeared as a field where intermittent recastings of lots, provisional allotments, and nominations were taking place. The absence of institutionalized forms of power transmission first concerned the aristocracy itself. We saw how nobility became dependent on imperial nomi-

nations in default of being a hereditary position. This situation was no less true of the monarchy: the lack of a legitimate heir could only intensify the power struggle and multiply claimants. The stage thus set for wide competition, the winners could only appear as the elect of God. The atmosphere of competition was further increased by regionalism, so much so that the whole political system perfectly echoed the ideas of election and fate.

The lack of hereditary entitlement reinforced the Ethiopian sense of the nothingness of power, or more precisely of the extreme vulnerability of power that did not have the backing of the Almighty. What sounded out of tune was the claim of inheritance to endow power with a measure of self-sufficiency, with a kind of autonomy that no longer required God's explicit free choice. In return, when power ceases to be hereditary, it does lend itself to an interpretation in terms of *idil*, that is, in terms of "falling" and "rising"⁹⁵ stars. The possibility of rise and fall, in addition to being appropriate to the power struggle so characteristic of the political system, allowed the qualification of those who rose to power as the chosen ones and of those who were falling as the disgraced ones. Plainly, the possibility of reversals was necessary to underpin the metaphysical outlook. Thus, people belonging to the upper classes were seen not so much as members of a distinct class as promoted groups of individuals who remained "up" only as long as divine fiat held them suspended.

Without fail, the interference of the language of *idil* in the political life spurred on clientelism. The belief in rising and falling stars filled each person with the desire to come across the right patron. Vertical relations were thus conceived in terms of *idil*, that is as relations liable to favor or harm one's fortune. More than having rights over other people, the master was a factor of mediation in the unfolding of *idil*. Because it worked against establishing rigid distinctions between people, the Ethiopian notion of fate also worked against couching the relation between superiors and subordinates in terms of conflict and struggle. The Marxist concept of class struggle, the assumption of fundamental conflict of interest between the different strata of society, is hardly Ethiopian. The ideal being the interweaving of interests, conflict was not the norm but the defect. If, as Gebru pointed out, "characteristic of peasant and lord relationships in old Abyssinia, clientelism bound individuals of unequal power and status for mutual benefits,"⁹⁶ the explanation lies in the magnetic force of *idil*.

Truly, then, social mobility was the highest instance validating the Ethiopian conception of fate. The Ethiopian Church, Markakis notes, "attributes

social position to one's capacity as well as to God or fate (*idil*). The last two forces appear to be fused into one."⁹⁷ In fact, Markakis's remark does not go far enough, for there is fusion of capacity and fate. When God raises a person to a position of power, He provides him/her with the appropriate qualities. Should this not be the case, the Ethiopian will not hesitate to denounce usurpation, illegitimate placement. For the Ethiopian, talent or capacity is primarily grace (*tsega*). Because it is so, the social system must be open. Social order and positions must not be regulated by human inclinations, preferences, and decrees, such as kinship or heredity; they must be open to divine fiat.

In trying to define Ethiopian social mobility, we suggested that it should not be viewed as a way of inducing general betterment by smoothing the demarcation between classes. Rather, it meant that, while positions were strictly defined, the persons occupying them were interchangeable. The mobility had no democratic interest in attenuating the discrepancy existing between classes in terms of rights and duties. How could it, when its express purpose was to materialize *idil*, that is, to effect unequal allotments? The mobility was therefore elitist rather than democratic. And it posed no restriction to the individuals thus promoted, since it was understood that their position authorized their full enjoyment of their fate.

It is no surprise, then, that the Ethiopians never created a social utopia. Since each person had an untouchable share, the idea of perfecting the social system from below could only appear as an attempt to cause disorder by questioning the wisdom of God's allotments. What should worry human beings was less the nature of their share than the certitude of being in their apportioned places. The earnest precaution against usurpation and inversion of places geared the very idea of social improvement towards political struggle rather than social change. The rule said: from where you are, you cannot improve your lot; so you must ascend to a higher position. And such places being limited, someone else must be dislodged and degraded. This conception of social life could hardly encourage the horizontal solidarity necessary to generate reformist social movements.

Still less was this notion of *idil* propitious for a positive interpretation of the self-made person. People who improved themselves through work or through the accumulation of money were neither admired nor accepted in the political hierarchy. What could be more at variance with grace than striving after wealth? Be they merchants or artisans, their very efforts be-

trayed an attempt to become what they were not, to occupy positions to which they were not entitled. Not that the Ethiopians despised wealth, but they thought that it must come through political office. Only political office could evince the personal values of courage and leadership, of physical and moral fortitude, that is, of the granted rather than the acquired qualities. Whereas the pursuit of money may very well be motivated by greed, wealth resulting from political office alone could corroborate the innate qualities, and hence the status of a person's *idil*.

This explains why the merchant class never played a significant role in the traditional polity. The very notion of a merchant class was profoundly antagonizing to the whole value system of the society. For that reason, trade was ostracized by being left to Muslims, who were excluded from the political hierarchy. The Ethiopians had difficulty in seeing the merchant as a person of value, given their inability to discern in trade activity the values by which they defined the ideal person, the *gobez*. Greed, miserliness, dishonesty, and servility were all they could see in the life of a merchant. Greenfield is right when he intimates that for the Ethiopians "courage is more important than achievement."⁹⁸

Unsurprisingly, war was the royal road to upward mobility; it was the opportunity *par excellence*, the primary target of *idil*. The point is that warlike values are not attainable by work; nor are they the products of heredity. They occur by grace, the unmistakable sign of divine election. This character of warlike values is essential for understanding how war became a motivation, even a vocation for the Ethiopians. True, as Levine indicated, "Amhara troops fought for personal gain from booty and to be acknowledged and rewarded by their superiors."⁹⁹ Yet one must go beyond this utilitarian motivation to grasp the metaphysical meaning of war. Rewards recognized personal merit, but before reward there was the anguish pertaining to one's *idil*. Herein lay the privileged role of war: by serving as a testing ground, it provided the answer to the harrowing question of where exactly one's place was. War was thus the great allocator of places, the father of social mobility.

It follows that war, inscribed in the culture itself as a means to find one's place in the society, was not exclusively tied up with the need for defense; nor was it obsessed with the question of being just or unjust. Tadesse Tamrat described well the relation of the Ethiopians to war when he spoke of "professional soldiers of fortune who had joined the court in search of wealth and adventure,"¹⁰⁰ provided the metaphysical quest tran-

spires in the utilitarian goal. Where the Ethiopians are likely to lose their passion for war is when their warlike values and merit fail to have their social translation, when they are no longer the chase of *idil*. Such became the case when Haile Selassie professionalized military service by the constitution of a standing army. From this time onwards, apart from the meager possibility of promotion to higher ranks, war had lost its metaphysical meaning. Warriors were no longer searching for their proper place; they had ceased to be soldiers of fortune and became soldiers for a living.

We can guess how decisive this association of warlike values and social mobility, with its inherent quest for destiny, was for the survival of Ethiopia. First, it dragged the most ambitious and able individuals into the business of war. This universal and powerful call put the defense of the nation in the hands of the best. Second, to remain a peasant or to stay in a lower class was seen as a refusal to be involved in a martial career; this social failure conferred enormous prestige on military valor, to the extent of being cultivated for its own sake. War had become a general way of conceptualizing the sense of life, one's position in the society, and one's relationship with God. It turned into a motivation by and for itself vested, beyond defense and gains, with the purpose of answering the question of who the individual was. Not only was such a society able to mobilize a huge army, but by transforming war into an individual calling it could hope to obtain dedication and enthusiasm in the practice of war. What could galvanize more enthusiasm and ambition than a society where war had become an opportunity over and above self-defense?

And the corollary of the central place of *idil* was the extreme sensitivity of the Ethiopians to superstitions and prophecies. As Pankhurst recalls, "there was widespread faith in prophecies, omens and auguries. Most people believed in . . . the skills of soothsayers, fortune-tellers and predictors of the future."¹⁰¹ Everywhere in the world human beings are doubtless prone to superstition. However, the intensity of the belief may vary and, in the case of Ethiopia—owing to the notion of *idil*—the belief in superstitions, prophecies, and fortune-tellers had reached a high pitch. Surely, a society which gives credence to favoritism—nay to the notion of wandering divine election—is particularly exposed to this kind of belief. Bolstered by this belief, each individual is a candidate, a potential favorite, and always inclined to assume that the best will be his/her lot.

In times of danger and crisis, this trust in prophecies can be of great help. In fact, the history of Ethiopia is replete with prophecies, often aim-

ing at upholding faith in victory. No destiny epitomizes better the importance of prophecy than the rise of Tewodros. The danger of the Era of the Princes could only incite the prophecy of a savior, itself preparing the rallying of the people as soon as an individual showed the first signs of an uncommon gift. So, in perfect agreement with the culture, Tewodros introduced himself as "the man whom God had raised up out the dust to save Ethiopia."¹⁰²

Menelik too had his prophecy. He chose the name Menelik with the view of being "the second great Menelik, as had been prophesied at his birth; he would restore the grandeur and power of Christian Ethiopia."¹⁰³ How far did the belief in the prophecy help Menelik to realize the grandeur of Ethiopia? No one can tell. But the question makes sense in the context of Ethiopia. For, as far as the Ethiopians are concerned, their history cannot be written without involving prophecies, which are the signs of God's interventions. Thus, for Mahteme Selassie, the Era of the Princes was due to God's disfavor, and the rise of Tewodros, Yohannes, and Menelik to the return of His favor:

Because the star of Ethiopia had suddenly shone, Emperor Tewodros, tentatively raised, restored the ancient unity of Ethiopia . . . However, what Emperor Tewodros and Emperor Yohannes started was accomplished by Emperor Menelik because he had very much luck."¹⁰⁴

For our Ethiopian scholar, still untouched by Western rationalism, the success of Menelik is caused neither by objective conditions and circumstances, nor even by the personal ability of Menelik, as all these factors were contrived by God. What happened during and after the Era of the Princes was simply a matter of divine election returning after it had been withdrawn.

Haile Selassie, too, understood all his life in terms of the coming and going of *idil*. Such was the way he interpreted his defeat by the Italians at Machew. What he did after the defeat is quite revealing. He went straight to Lalibela and prayed in the church of Medhane Alem:

For forty-eight hours the emperor remained in the church hewn out of the mountain; not a crumb of *injera* (native bread), not a drop of water passed his lips. He was alone with his God to whom he

had offered up so many prayers, to whom he had brought so many of his people to pray—his God who had denied him victory.¹⁰⁵

Because he visualized his defeat as a punishment, a disfavor, all he could do was to try to regain the favor through prayers and submission. Haile Selassie was particularly inclined to think thus as his amazing rise to power appeared to him as the indisputable sign of election. Indeed, "he suffered the ups and downs of fortune usual in the case of Abyssinian chieftains, and at one time it looked as though he might well end his days in obscurity, or possibly even captivity."¹⁰⁶ Just as his rise to power, his defeat, and his victorious return were manifestations of *idil*, so his final overthrow by his own army was for him a moment of disgrace, of loss of favor. Asked to be more aggressive against the military, he retorted: "Our era is over. There is no use trying to fight the Almighty."¹⁰⁷

Lastly, the idea of *idil* pervaded the economic organization itself, in particular the landholding system. So long as land was conceived of as a grant, an allotment, it could hardly become a private holding. Being God's property, it allowed usufructuary right and not possession. Moreover, the prevention of landlessness by the *rist* system reinforced the concept of apportionment, and the whole hierarchy was erected on a minimum of allotment to everybody. Two essential requirements of the ideology of *idil* were thus realized. Since there was no private ownership of land, positions in the hierarchy were not due to material possessions. Personal, immaterial qualities, which alone manifested divine fiat, were the decisive factor of social promotion. The minimum share opened up the competition from which none was excluded by rigid material distinctions, thereby allowing the rise of the favored ones only.

To recapitulate, the Ethiopian concept of fate is not equivalent to fatalism; it was the sense of mobility imparted by a shifting divine will. Its contribution to the survival of Ethiopia is remarkable. It generated the ideology of the *Kibre Negest*, which bred a stubborn ethos of survival by portraying Ethiopia as the elect of God. In turn, the ideology inspired an organization designed to ensure survival. As the elect of God, the emperor was the central figure around which the sociopolitical system revolved and to which absolute allegiance was due. The emperor and all those in a position of power had to prove their election by deeds of merit, especially of martial valor, unable as they were to rely on hereditary rights. This obligation to prove merit provided Ethiopia with a tested and able leadership.

This same ideology of favoritism and divine clientelism instituted an open society, promoting social mobility on the basis of each according to his/her *idil*. A major consequence of this idea of allotment was the coordination of faith with the defense of the social system. It became impossible for the Ethiopians to live their faith outside the social system. The overlap between the religious and the sociopolitical system could only sharpen the will to survive. No less important was the consensus accruing from social mobility. The belief that each individual was in the proper place created a large consensus concerning those in power, just as the enticing picture of an open mobility propelled the dissatisfied. The game of power struggle being open, dissension and dissatisfaction were changed into competition instead of leading to disunity and separatism. In a word, the ideology of *idil* prevented the ossification of social life, thus sustaining a willing and regenerating disposition to defend the system.

FROM ART AND LITERATURE

Assuming that art and literature are the depository of a people's values—moreover that they display those values in a more dramatized and articulated fashion—our study of Ethiopian values would gain in clarity and concreteness were it underpinned by the traditional art and literature of Ethiopia. Such a confirmation would also validate the realism of the analysis. To obtain the confirmation, a detailed analysis is not needed, however. The exposure of the general spirit of Ethiopian art and literature is enough to indicate the extent to which this study reflects the value system. Let us begin with art.

The first chapter probed the likelihood of connections between the traditional music and the geographical features of Ethiopia. It related the contrasts pervading the musical composition to the physical disparities of the geographical environment. The deepening and widening of this approach may help us to probe the recesses of the Ethiopian mind. Since we want to bring into relief the spirit of artistic production, the best way is to inquire as to whether there is what is called a style, and if so, to define it, for the style organizes, fashions the material.

Western scholars do not find Ethiopian artistic creations beautiful, any more than they think them technically sophisticated or even realistic. They do admit to being impressed and intrigued, just as they are fascinated by

the geographical disparities of Ethiopia. What impresses is always contrast. What kind of contrast defines the Ethiopian style?

Much has been said about the originality of Ethiopian art. According to some theoreticians, Ethiopian artistic production is essentially made of borrowed materials and styles, and so lacks originality. For instance, Perham does not hesitate to ascribe the dearth of original works to the fact that "the Ethiopians are deficient in inventiveness, in creativeness, and in traditions of craft and industry."¹⁰⁸ The opposite view is held by Greenfield: regretting that the usual tendency to explain African achievements by foreign influence is again applied to Ethiopia, he assures us that "the later stelae of Aksum, the monolithic churches of Lalibela and the castles of Gondar . . . were the work of local craftsmen," as "the style is not found outside Ethiopia."¹⁰⁹

Many scholars agree on the singularity of the style. Borrowings have certainly been extensive; Judaic, Arab, and Byzantine influences are clearly visible. But so is the distinct impression that the style is essentially Ethiopian. That there is, beyond borrowings, a purely Ethiopian style is an idea suggested by Michael Powne:

Many examples can be given where the culture is derivative—in the liturgy, in church customs, in the language and script, in social customs, in painting and architecture, to name just a few—but in almost every case what was derived has in the course of five, ten, fifteen, or more centuries been marked with an unmistakable Ethiopian stamp To reach any conclusion about the relationship between Ethiopian culture and the neighbouring cultures is complicated by this disguising of the elements brought from elsewhere.¹¹⁰

Stanislaw Chojnacki, who has conducted the most extensive studies of Ethiopian painting, is of the same opinion:

The study of Ethiopian painting is mainly a search for prototypes and the channels through which these prototypes reached Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the receptive character of Ethiopian artists did not prevent them from making significant iconographic adaptations and important changes in the style of the models.¹¹¹

How logical and natural all this is! What the previous chapters had reiterated, namely the ethos of survival, reappears. It does so by the imposition

of a style which naturalizes all that is borrowed. Furthermore, is there a better way for the messianic guardianship to fulfill its mission than to preserve borrowings in a form which protects them from alteration and change? Would this not be the case if the style is such that it immobilizes and "renews itself in a perpetual flow of exuberant arabesques"?¹¹² Indeed, if the style is expressive of the vocation of guardianship, we should expect less emphasis on the fashioning of materials, less technicality and realism, but a greater tendency towards abstraction and simplicity. The style of guardianship cannot be otherwise, given the concentration on the ornament designed to shield what is considered to be essential. Once more the Ethiopians were successful: the borrowed "prototypes lasted longer than in their countries of origin."¹¹³

Let it not be forgotten, however, that overtures to foreign influences were constantly checked by a strong spirit of conservatism: borrowed elements had to be authenticated; what borrowings there were had to be made preservable. What better way of doing this than to strip them of all the characters inducing mobility and change? They cease to be perishable if they are rendered inviolable. This was the manner in which borrowings were naturalized, Ethiopianized: their acceptance depended not so much on their novelty as on the method of assimilation coercing them into bearing the Ethiopian stamp.

Perham is right: the Ethiopians are not innovators. They are not imitators, either. Their attitude is best described by the term narcissism. In what they borrow, they want to visualize themselves, to find confirmation of their own identity, to read their own rebirth and celebration. Flowing from the spirit of election, this narcissism authenticates in such a way as to find itself, to wit, preservation under the seal of election. To Ethiopianize is to impart the quality of durability, of inviolability; it is to preserve from mobility and transiency. In a word, it is to petrify. If so, there is indeed an authentic Ethiopian style. Let us see whether its features correspond with its assigned meaning.

Here again a comparative approach may facilitate our task. The agreement of scholars on the influence of Byzantine artistic canons on Ethiopian traditional painting further supports the approach. Adherence to the same Orthodox creed and historical connections have no doubt caused the rapprochement of artistic needs. Naturally, the geometric and abstract nature of Byzantine art was most welcome. As a critic elucidates,

traditional Ethiopian church painting is relentlessly two-dimensional. Its form and iconography derive from the Byzantine. The flat colour, decorative pattern, symbolism, and erratic geometry of Ethiopian painting transform the physical world into line, shape, and colour, into idea and spirit.¹¹⁴

Ethiopian religiosity, such as we have defined it, could not have found a better expression than the Byzantine tendency to dematerialize the physical world. Since everything is by God and for God and dualistic representations are not defensible for want of autonomy, nothing could more attract a spirituality so contrived than a style determined to rarify things, to deprive them of their density and materiality, so as to make transparent the spiritual force conditioning them.

To be sure, the spirituality pervading Ethiopian art does not stimulate the realization of what is called the beautiful. Indeed, no critic will judge Ethiopian painting beautiful, as it displays neither harmony nor regularity and order of forms. Perfection of forms is not what Ethiopian artists had in mind; instead, like Byzantine art, "vividness of expression"¹¹⁵ was their aim, mainly achieved by means of denatured, almost deformed forms. Whereas the beautiful satisfies us by its completeness and perfection, Ethiopian representation is singularly deficient, intentionally at variance with perfection. We are less gratified than impressed. Since perfection presupposes the harmony of form and content, the stress of Ethiopian religiosity on the infinite power of God and on the relative nothingness of the created world could hardly allow the representation of the beautiful. Precisely, to get rid of consistency and density, the representation had to insert a gap between the idea and the physical by deforming and scraping the forms. Through this kind of escarpment alone, itself reminiscent of the geographical feature, could it intimate the transcendence of God.

The Byzantine influence on Ethiopian art was never anything more than the invigoration of Ethiopian spirituality. It reflected the spirit of early Christianity: its greater awareness of God's omnipotence contrasted with that of the Renaissance, when the need to rationalize took hold of Christianity. From the Renaissance onwards, European Christianity will endow human beings with the right to pursue their own ends. Art will express this view by the canon of the beautiful, through the reconciliation of the infinite and the finite, of form and content. The Ethiopian attachment to a style prone to rarify natural forms was therefore an expression of early Christianity—which, be it noted, corresponded to the Ethiopian vo-

cation of guardianship of what was believed to be pristine, genuine Christianity. Such a style made the power of God tangible: through the deformation and suppression of physical forms, it celebrated His omnipotence. At the same time, the debasement of the physical ensured the possibility of indefinite preservation. So disembodied and subdued a presentation relinquished all principle of change and motion: it was immobilized, frozen, dragged out of time.

By contrast, the detection of African traits in Ethiopian art is not easy. In fact, many scholars think that Ethiopian aesthetics was a stranger to African inspiration. This is the opinion of Paul B. Henze and Chojnacki, who note that "the main thrust of development in Ethiopian art has never had a great deal in common with features that are considered peculiarly African."¹¹⁶ Two reasons seem to support the allegation: the scant importance, if not the absence, of sculpture and the reluctance of the Ethiopians to have recourse to "imaginative and grotesque portraiture of animals and human beings."¹¹⁷ However, other critics do not share this view. For instance, Girma Moges discerns African characteristics in Ethiopian art. The main similarity emerges from the fact that, like African art, Ethiopian painting prefers "perceptual, rather than visual representation of the human form."¹¹⁸ In other words, the fusion of the different aspects of the object in the same presentation, instead of the projection of a single angle of vision, defines African and Ethiopian arts alike.

The question is no doubt a complex one. Thus, if sculpture was very undeveloped in Ethiopia, the main reason was sculpture's inability to express Ethiopian spirituality such as we have conceptualized it. Of all things, de-materialization or rarefaction was barely possible with the dense and voluminous forms of sculpture. Lines and colors in painting are incomparably less solid, infinitely lighter, almost immaterial. Equally inadequate is the consistency of sculpture to intimate nothingness and dependence: sculptural forms conquer autonomy whereby they incarnate magical powers, harbor supernatural forces. The privileged quality of painting is to permit figural iconography, but such that it is, so to speak, skimmed by abstraction and immaterialization. This trait was enough to captivate Orthodox spirituality.

That said, there remains the undeniable fact that Ethiopian painting is not a realistic representation. Like African art, it conveys meanings by "distorting personages."¹¹⁹ In both cases, the purpose of art is not so much to reproduce reality as to suggest spiritual meanings through distorted and

dramatized forms. Even if Byzantine art had a similar propensity, Ethiopian painting has undoubtedly developed it further. This excrescence may imply that the Byzantine influence had but strengthened an already existing African penchant. Naturally, this synthetic aspect of Ethiopian art is puzzling. As Jules Leroy puts it,

confronted with outlines and volumes which are neither entirely African nor entirely Byzantine or Western, scholars who have been trained according to different aesthetic assumptions, as propounded in universities, have found it impossible to assign to Ethiopian art an appropriate place in the categories with which they are familiar.¹²⁰

Girma is right: one aspect of Ethiopian art recalling African aesthetic apprehension is the method of fusing different perspectives of the object in one representation. This gives an odd, awkward picture of things and people. Gestures which ought to be successive appear simultaneously. For example, a man on a horse seen in profile has his face and hand in front view, or a man is standing, while a part of his body bows. People and objects are viewed at the same time either from distinct perspectives or different moments. The result is the coexistence, the superposition of forms displaying people and events as they are at a given moment, but also as they were a moment before or as they will be a moment after. Thus, in the picture of a battle, different moments coexist connected to different spaces and episodes so that the representation tells a story rather than an instant. Yet the dislocation and displacement do not cause tense and violent forms. Awkward as it may seem, the superposition of gestures and events appear normal and is shrouded in a serene atmosphere.

Is not this juxtaposition suggesting, in a sense, movement? It would have done so, were not the mobility congealed. Above all, the Ethiopian painting avoids displaying the continuity of gesture. A form in transition, be it a potential position or an unfinished gesture, is never displayed. Rather than being made, movements are already made. As if soaked in an ether of necessity, forms do not exhibit any indetermination or evolution. Nor do we expect from them any surprise and initiative. The superposition is then intended to obviate succession and continuity as though gestures, instead of being in time, successive, could be stacked. What would better suggest the idea of destiny, of the implacable control of persons and events than these petrified movements? In not presenting persons and events

in process, the painting cut them off from their principle of life and movement. In this sense, traditional Ethiopian painting is the visible image of fate.

Let us generalize this remark. All the characters of Ethiopian painting have the function of denuding the physical world of substantiality. As the rejection of synchronism, the tendency to simplify figures to the strict essential, the practice of relating elements in defiance of the laws of distance and proportion of the visible world, the absence of perspective so that forms are flat and without depth, are all indications that the painting is as far removed from realism as anything can be.¹²¹ In return, its spiritual meaning is but evident: the mistreatment of forms is how their utter dependence on God, their nothingness, is vindicated. Chojnacki is right when he characterizes Ethiopian painting as "prayer in color,"¹²² as a profound expression of Ethiopian piety.

This piety is forcefully expressed by the contrast between the personages "shown in a frontal position, rigid, lifeless and seeming not concerned with the actions they are supposed to be performing"¹²³ and their invariably big and impressive eyes. On closer examination, these wide-eyed figures do not look; they are rather looked at to the extent of appearing hypnotized. Unmistakably, these hypnotized eyes convey the idea of a kind of puppet show, vividly transmitting the notion of allotment. The personages do not act; they are acted instead, as though their position and role were imparted to them through their hypnotized eyes. Nothing could better suggest the omnipotence of God than these vivid yet unobserving eyes. That the central position is always occupied by the main person is also an expression of fate as allotment.

Evidently, the impression of unreality conveyed by Ethiopian painting perfectly accords with the wax-and-gold dichotomy. Through the distortion and rarefaction of forms, the artist goes beyond appearance in order to reveal the truth, the gold. In stripping the personages of their density, roundness, and dimension, in reducing them to the main point, he is transposing us into the real, spiritual world. The work of the artist is therefore rasping off the wax so that the gold may shine. The painter does not respect the laws of space and time because he has taken us in a different, ethereal world where lightness, thinness, and transparency replace opacity, solidity, and thickness. Hence the impression that forms are "suspended in the air,"¹²⁴ flooded as they are with light and color. Thanks to the play of abstract lines and colors, forms steep in a space of light. The layout of

forms in this superterrestrial light gives a gripping idea of the presence of the Almighty.

Not surprisingly, this same spirit is most active in Ethiopian literature with traditionalist inspiration. Those who have studied it were stricken by its tendency "to be schematic, containing little more than the bare bones of the action with little or no effort expended on the psychology of the characters or on descriptive or pictorial passages."¹²⁵ The simplification and abstraction are such that the characters, even the most important ones, are schematic and situated in a social environment whose aspect and influence are poorly described. Above all, psychological and sociological analyses are reduced to a minimum. Feelings arise and disappear without any continuity so that characters do not appear in their evolution. Since phenomena are not evolving in the true sense of the word, the distinct impression of a literary production quite different from the Western model is given. Neither psychological nor sociological laws condition the life of the characters, who seem to be placed in an unreal world. They meet without conditioning each other, and each seems to follow an exclusively allotted destiny.

The role of abstraction in Ethiopian literature has inspired contradictory remarks. According to Thomas Leiper Kane, the absence of realism expresses the lack of "willingness to confront life as it is lived in Ethiopia and to observe carefully and probe deeply in their [writers'] search for understanding."¹²⁶ The opposite view is held by Reidulf Knut Molvaer: "Ethiopian authors of fiction are strongly concerned with social and cultural life of their time This literature is not purely art for art's sake, or for entertainment."¹²⁷ Kane's negative assessment stems from his inability to understand the real meaning of abstraction in literature. In detecting only an escape from real life disguised with "moralistic-didactic stories,"¹²⁸ he misses the way in which the Ethiopians endeavor to reach the truth, just as he fails to see that the moralistic-didactic approach is for them the language most appropriate to express it.

For the Ethiopian writer and reader, the meaning of a literary work lies precisely in the didactic purpose, which conveys the spiritual message of the story. The moralistic and didactic content of the story is not being superposed on reality such as it appears; rather, it is what depicts the reality beyond the visible. Being of a spiritual nature, this reality requires a moralistic-didactic language as well as the method of abstraction by which appearance is put aside. So contrived, the literary work does no more than reiterate Ethiopian spirituality, that is, the nothingness and vanity of hu-

man beings and things, and their absolute dependence on God. Convinced that the created reality has no substance and autonomy, the thinking person cannot indulge in the writing of novels of Western type, in which characters grow, are influenced by their environment, and produce an outcome of their own. Inasmuch as this view presupposes that they control the principle of their own life and evolution, it comes up against the Ethiopian mentality.

According to Ethiopian writers, characters are only instruments of God, who is and remains the only real hero. So there is no point in analyzing their evolution and initiative. The writer is only interested in showing how these characters, despite their repeated will to affirm their autonomy, end up by asserting the design of God. The moralistic-didactic discourse is constructed by the struggle between the radical dependence of human beings and their attempt to become sovereign. This, in turn, entails the allotment of rewards and punishments. But let no one be misled by appearances and conclude that Ethiopian literature exhibits tragic characters. The Western type of tragic characters struggling against their destiny and often succumbing as heroes is naturally unknown. The moralistic-didactic purpose presents the struggle, not as heroic, but as vain, as a product of *tigab*. The story evolves less in the form of real struggle than in a staged fashion, all designed to evince the triumph of God. For the same reason, comic characters do not appear. Stories are so suffused with a biblical atmosphere that there is no place for comedy.

Let me illustrate this analysis by reference to some representative novels. Afework Gebre Yesus's novel, *Tobbya*, springs to mind: it is the first fiction written in Amharic and highly indicative of Ethiopian thinking. With no exaggeration, the novel epitomizes the Ethiopian notion of *idil*, the philosophy of life of the Ethiopians. The novel relates a complicated story which can be summarized as follows. A charitable merchant pays the ransom for the freedom of a Christian general, who has been made prisoner. While the general's son, Wahed, is on his way to express gratitude to the merchant, he is captured and sold into slavery. This incident obliges the general to go in search of his son, accompanied by Wahed's sister, Tobbya. But both are held prisoner by a pagan king, who nevertheless behaves in a friendly way, even agreeing to rescue Wahed. Meanwhile, a lady, the king's cousin, falls in love with Tobbya, who all along has been disguised as a boy. When the true sexual identity of Tobbya is revealed, the pagan king falls in love with her, while Wahed, finally rescued, is at

tracted by the king's cousin. However, being a Christian, Tobbya refuses to marry the king, who is not. This leads to the conversion of the king and his people to Christianity.

What is most striking in the novel is the series of events that are reversals. Free persons become slaves and slaves free persons, a pagan king falls in love with a Christian girl, a pagan people is converted to Christianity, etc. The ups and downs of life, the fleeting nature of human destinies, as visualized by the Ethiopians, could not have been better expressed. No matter that these reversals occur according to a sequence of events that seems unlikely. If anything, the dramatization produced by the unlikelihood of the events is sought after. Such events are not supposed to be realistic: their purpose is to dramatize the notion of *idil* through abrupt reversals. In this way, the omnipotence and mystery of God are strongly depicted.

For the real hero of the novel is none other than God. The extraordinary encounters of persons of extraordinary qualities, the constant reversals of their positions, the final conversion of a pagan king and his people to Christianity, all these events relate the realization of God's will. The novel portrays the unfolding of God's plan through the instrumentality of these uncommon characters and amazing events. Especially, the beauty of Tobbya and the love she inspires to the king are vital to the conversion of an entire people to Christianity. As Afework said, "all believed in Christ because of a woman."¹²⁹ The hand of God is everywhere; it inspires the generosity of the merchant as well as the kindness of the pagan king. The more uncommon the event, the more visible becomes the intervention of God. As Gérard comments,

nothing of this is really implausible to the traditional Ethiopian mind, which has been deeply affected by the high degree of fatalism inherent in Coptic Christianity: since everything is in the hands of God, and since God can perform any miracle, no amount of arbitrary coincidence introduced by the writer can strike the reader as lacking in verisimilitude.¹³⁰

The mistaken view of fatalism prevents Gérard's comment from understanding that *idil* is less a final and static lot than a way of becoming God's instrument, of participating in the generation of transcendent events. Because *idil* is never deductive and linear, it is conceived as a share, as a proposed opportunity in the advent of God's triumph. It is made of reversals, of unexpected events, fitting in with a dramatized presentation. While

the novel is an edifying one in which love, Christianity, and good triumph over evil and paganism, its literary value lies in the dramatization of this triumph, in the way in which the mysterious, wise, and unpredictable ways of God are extolled. It is not a novel about human beings but about God's ways. Though the moralistic and didactic goal of the novel is obvious, precisely it does not simply say that God always triumphs, but that He does so through dramatized, unexpected, and thrilling events amounting to an odyssey.

Tobbya also revives the central myth of Ethiopia, the belief in being the elect of God. The novel can even be considered as "a contemporary fictional interpretation of the myth of the founding of a unified community and its subsequent legitimation as the chosen of God."¹³¹ Indeed, the conversion of a pagan people through the instrumentality of *Tobbya* brings to an end the religious war and unifies the country. *Tobbya's* beauty is pure grace, the visible manifestation of election exerting an irresistible power over the pagan king. More will be said in the coming chapters on the modern symbolism of *Tobbya*. Suffice it to point out here that the novel reproduces the atmosphere of a special relationship between God and Ethiopia. The beauty of *Tobbya* is vested with the mission of converting paganism to Christianity, just as in the past the yielding of King Solomon to the beauty of the Ethiopian queen transferred divine election from Israel to Ethiopia.

Another eminent representative novel of Ethiopian mentality is *Fikre Iske Mekaber*. We have already used the novel to portray the social structure of traditional Ethiopia. With respect to religiosity, too, the novel is fraught with revealing remarks. Thus, the Ethiopian idea that the world is a stage for the ongoing divine drama in which human beings, whatever be their position, are only instruments, is cogently present in the novel. The real and only hero is still the Almighty. Though the novel reflects some adventitious Western ideas, such as the interpretation of asceticism from a Western perspective and the biased attitude vis-à-vis the aristocracy in favor of uprooted persons, the overwhelming place of God gives the novel an unmistakable Ethiopian flavor. God decides, blesses, curses; he makes some happy and others unhappy, and all human beings are but actors. For instance, just before dying, the main character, Bezabeh, makes the following statement: "How surprising! Whether human beings do evil or good, they are only instruments. It is no use blaming and hating, or praising and loving them, as the only maker is God."¹³²

For those tempted to understand this as an expression of fatalism, I would simply remind them how firmly the Ethiopians are convinced of the efficiency of prayer, fasting, and supplication. There is no contradiction between the assumption that God decides everything and the belief that nothing is final, so long as the power of God is said to implicate indeterminacy. In effect, *Fikre Iske Mekaber* is a spate of tragic denouements and reversals, affecting all the main characters, and through which the whole religiosity and powerlessness of human beings are emphasized. The greater the tragedy, the more the precariousness of human beings is stressed, and the higher becomes the place of God. Tragedy should be taken here less in the Western sense of struggle than in the sense of sad ends. Because Ethiopian literary works so often depict unhappy stories, some critics have concluded that they reflect the sadness of the Ethiopian people. This wrong conclusion forgets the purpose of literature for the Ethiopians, which is not to describe reality, but to draw moralistic and didactic messages. What happens in the novel is not assumed to be real; it is the simplified, abstracted, and didactic construction of a reality which is, of course, more complex, commonplace, and less accentuated.

That all the characters are under the control of God, that He decides what they are and what they become, is expressed in *Fikre Iske Mekaber* by the fact that all interpret what happens to them in terms of fate, *idil*, chance. The main hero ascribes all his misfortunes to punishment for having opposed his mother's wish. She wanted him to become a monk; he desired "to get married and to have a house."¹³³ Seeing his misfortunes, he can only conclude: "But it seems that when God created me, he did not choose me for this kind of life."¹³⁴ Seble, the girl he loved against the will of her father, adds: "Because from the beginning he fled from the life allotted to him by his Creator, and thus disappointed his parents as well as God, he started to feel strongly that he was a sinner who deserved to be punished."¹³⁵

The beginning of the novel is marked by the notion of fate. Thus, Bezabeh's mother, who has already lost three husbands, is persuaded that she was born with bad luck.¹³⁶ She becomes blind, and loses her fourth husband. This is too much: "Why is God against me? Why is He determined to hurt me, to dispossess me?"¹³⁷ she asks. Her complaint changes into a typical Ethiopian attitude when she adds: "How can I reconcile with Him? What must I do?"¹³⁸

Equally Ethiopian is the scene of the duel. *Fitewrari Meshesha*, the father of Seble and the instrument of the unfolding tragedies, under the

pretext of mistreatment, challenges to a duel *Fitewari* Asge who is younger than he, so far victorious, and feared. Seeing the difference in age, *Fitewari* Asge prefers to settle the dispute in a friendly way by sending emissaries and expressing regrets. This even further offends *Fitewari* Meshesha, who retorts by this reflection on the reversal of fates: "time has penalized me; it has favored you."¹³⁹ And the people could find no other terms to describe the stubborn desire of the old man to fight an adversary stronger than he than to say: "It is *tigab*. Instead of waiting, as old persons do, for the death that God will send him, is it not *tigab* that he is thus after death?"¹⁴⁰

Another Ethiopian trait which is stressed in the novel is the fear of social derision. Because Bezabeh had been of delicate health, his mother had pledged to make him a monk. However, his father is worried: What if Bezabeh will decide to have a wife and a house? Undoubtedly, "blamed for breaking the vow of celibacy, he will become the object of general derision Let alone celibacy, even withdrawal from priesthood is more shameful than being a thief."¹⁴¹ The fear of public derision is also tormenting Seble. She is no longer of an age to marry because of her father's refusal to accept a husband from outside the upper aristocratic class. Her fear of gossip and derision of neighbors¹⁴² was such that she lost the courage to meet people outside her house. In short, derision punishes presumption. Such is the case when a vow is not kept or when a marriage proposal is refused on account of class origin. To be a thief is less shameful owing to the absence of presumption. Derision goes always with rank and ambition. If individuals are not in their due places, or fail to accomplish their promises, or behave in a manner inappropriate to their rank, then the corrosive effect of derision is unleashed.

Araya is another work of fiction fraught with Ethiopian traits and values. The novel starts with a stroke of *idil*: the main character, Araya, is chosen by a French lady from among the children of his class to go to France to study. The chapter is entitled "The Unexpected Course,"¹⁴³ and Araya resolves: "I will not spoil this chance that God opened for me to realize my goal."¹⁴⁴ This special relationship between Araya and God, this climate of election, is sustained throughout the novel. After finishing his studies in France, Araya returns to Ethiopia and becomes a government employee. Being on bad terms with his superior, he prefers to become a farmer. During the Italian invasion, he joins the patriots and assumes the leadership of a fighting group. In this zigzag course of life, we recognize the ways of *idil*. The position of Ethiopia as the elect of God

For those tempted to understand this as an expression of fatalism, I would simply remind them how firmly the Ethiopians are convinced of the efficiency of prayer, fasting, and supplication. There is no contradiction between the assumption that God decides everything and the belief that nothing is final, so long as the power of God is said to implicate indeterminacy. In effect, *Fikre Iske Mekaber* is a spate of tragic denouements and reversals, affecting all the main characters, and through which the whole religiosity and powerlessness of human beings are emphasized. The greater the tragedy, the more the precariousness of human beings is stressed, and the higher becomes the place of God. Tragedy should be taken here less in the Western sense of struggle than in the sense of sad ends. Because Ethiopian literary works so often depict unhappy stories, some critics have concluded that they reflect the sadness of the Ethiopian people. This wrong conclusion forgets the purpose of literature for the Ethiopians, which is not to describe reality, but to draw moralistic and didactic messages. What happens in the novel is not assumed to be real; it is the simplified, abstracted, and didactic construction of a reality which is, of course, more complex, commonplace, and less accentuated.

That all the characters are under the control of God, that He decides what they are and what they become, is expressed in *Fikre Iske Mekaber* by the fact that all interpret what happens to them in terms of fate, *idil*, chance. The main hero ascribes all his misfortunes to punishment for having opposed his mother's wish. She wanted him to become a monk; he desired "to get married and to have a house."¹³³ Seeing his misfortunes, he can only conclude: "But it seems that when God created me, he did not choose me for this kind of life."¹³⁴ Seble, the girl he loved against the will of her father, adds: "Because from the beginning he fled from the life allotted to him by his Creator, and thus disappointed his parents as well as God, he started to feel strongly that he was a sinner who deserved to be punished."¹³⁵

The beginning of the novel is marked by the notion of fate. Thus, Bezabeh's mother, who has already lost three husbands, is persuaded that she was born with bad luck.¹³⁶ She becomes blind, and loses her fourth husband. This is too much: "Why is God against me? Why is He determined to hurt me, to dispossess me?"¹³⁷ she asks. Her complaint changes into a typical Ethiopian attitude when she adds: "How can I reconcile with Him? What must I do?"¹³⁸

Equally Ethiopian is the scene of the duel. *Fitewari Meshesha*, the father of Seble and the instrument of the unfolding tragedies, under the

pretext of mistreatment, challenges to a duel *Fitewrari* Asge who is younger than he, so far victorious, and feared. Seeing the difference in age, *Fitewrari* Asge prefers to settle the dispute in a friendly way by sending emissaries and expressing regrets. This even further offends *Fitewrari* Meshesha, who retorts by this reflection on the reversal of fates: "time has penalized me; it has favored you."¹³⁹ And the people could find no other terms to describe the stubborn desire of the old man to fight an adversary stronger than he than to say: "It is *tigab*. Instead of waiting, as old persons do, for the death that God will send him, is it not *tigab* that he is thus after death?"¹⁴⁰

Another Ethiopian trait which is stressed in the novel is the fear of social derision. Because Bezabeh had been of delicate health, his mother had pledged to make him a monk. However, his father is worried: What if Bezabeh will decide to have a wife and a house? Undoubtedly, "blamed for breaking the vow of celibacy, he will become the object of general derision Let alone celibacy, even withdrawal from priesthood is more shameful than being a thief."¹⁴¹ The fear of public derision is also tormenting Seble. She is no longer of an age to marry because of her father's refusal to accept a husband from outside the upper aristocratic class. Her fear of gossip and derision of neighbors¹⁴² was such that she lost the courage to meet people outside her house. In short, derision punishes presumption. Such is the case when a vow is not kept or when a marriage proposal is refused on account of class origin. To be a thief is less shameful owing to the absence of presumption. Derision goes always with rank and ambition. If individuals are not in their due places, or fail to accomplish their promises, or behave in a manner inappropriate to their rank, then the corrosive effect of derision is unleashed.

Araya is another work of fiction fraught with Ethiopian traits and values. The novel starts with a stroke of *idil*: the main character, Araya, is chosen by a French lady from among the children of his class to go to France to study. The chapter is entitled "The Unexpected Course,"¹⁴³ and Araya resolves: "I will not spoil this chance that God opened for me to realize my goal."¹⁴⁴ This special relationship between Araya and God, this climate of election, is sustained throughout the novel. After finishing his studies in France, Araya returns to Ethiopia and becomes a government employee. Being on bad terms with his superior, he prefers to become a farmer. During the Italian invasion, he joins the patriots and assumes the leadership of a fighting group. In this zigzag course of life, we recognize the ways of *idil*. The position of Ethiopia as the elect of God

also runs through the novel. For the author, the survival of Ethiopia is the unmistakable sign that it enjoys God's special favor. We read:

Is not the long survival of Ethiopia due to its prayer and faith in God, seeing that it has never depended on its power? . . . Given the fact that from among the African and Asiatic peoples God has preserved Ethiopia for so long, He will never abandon her. This is certain. This is the indestructible belief of all Ethiopians.¹⁴⁵

Most interesting in the novel is the discussion between Araya and an old and traditionally-minded noble on the role of fate. The old man is of the opinion that the distinction between the strong and the weak, the superior and the subordinate, is in the nature of things. "It is derived from *idil*, which is God's unshakable decision and law,"¹⁴⁶ he explains. This order based on fate must be accepted, for "if each individual, in the name of equality, starts claiming rights and behaves defiantly, nothing will be gained except disunity and conflict at the expense of the spirit of mutual respect, consideration, and love."¹⁴⁷ By way of further specification of his thinking, he adds:

though fate and merit are distinct, yet in our country nothing prevents the person who works hard from being successful. On the contrary, lineage and blood have little importance in Shoa. With the exception of those who are destined for the throne, any person, whether he is poor or even prisoner, provided that he has merit and is recognized by the emperor, can gain respect and rise. Many are those who became famous by their own merit and effort.¹⁴⁸

Araya does not object to this exposition of the ideological foundation of Ethiopian social hierarchy and mobility. He even adds that while other countries are based on clear-cut class and ethnic distinctions, Ethiopia has been spared many troubles because it is wise enough to accept mobility. His only worry is that, in the name of *idil*, many artificial barriers are set. This should change, for "when we speak of *idil*, it must be truly derived from nature."¹⁴⁹ The position of Araya is interesting, since he seems to suggest that a way should be found to modernize the notion of *idil* while maintaining its traditional role. He may have even perceived how insidiously, helped on by modernization, the belief is increasingly used to justify undue privileges.

In any case, the discussion of Araya with the old noble gives a fair idea of the traditional value system of Ethiopia. Based on *idil*, the social hierarchy is believed to place each person in his/her proper place. This belief has spared Ethiopia the trouble of revolutions by generating the consensus according to which individuals occupy the place they deserve. In a nutshell, the notion of *idil* unlocks the secret of Ethiopian survival. Besides guarding the society against disruption, flexibility constantly created an opportunity for able leadership and the large willingness to fight for a system presumed to put each person in his/her right place.

Where the Ethiopian mentality has found its most accurate expression is, however, in the novels of Mekonen Endalkachew, himself a leading member of the traditional aristocracy. *Araya* and *Fikre Iske Mekaber*, while still preserving the traditional mentality, are yet stained with adventitious ideas resulting from the Western exposure of their author. They are also faced with the problem of modernization, which they attempt to solve through increased Westernization. No such preoccupations upset Mekonen. His novels present a pure description of the traditional thinking and value system. Nowhere else do we find characters so oversimplified and so nailed to their personal destiny that, other than their constant and tormented dialogue with God, they seem to live in complete isolation. Gérard's judgment that Mekonen "should probably be regarded as the perfect expression of what was best in a doomed tradition, both religious and political,"¹⁵⁰ is therefore correct. Equally correct is the characterization of his novels by a "built-in transcendentalism," that is by the "sense of the unbridgeable gap between man and God," and "the irremediable weakness of man and the utter vanity of the world."¹⁵¹

Mekonen's works evince the central place of fate, but even more so the extent to which the Ethiopian notion of fate differs from fatalism. To illustrate this point, I will take the novel *Alem Weretegna* [*The Inconsistent World*]. Following the loss of her parents, a young girl, Yayne Abeba, becomes the slave of a vicious and cruel woman. A young priest helps her to escape. Unfortunately, the priest is killed by thieves while Yayne Abeba takes refuge in a monastery. There the Abbot tells her to serve with devotion a woman who has taken a vow of complete silence. Later, the woman has a dream in which she is told that her servant is none other than her lost daughter. She breaks the vow of silence by revealing her true identity. She had joined the monastery because her husband died after the loss of their daughter.

Why did the girl become the servant of a cruel woman? Why did she meet the priest who brought her close the monastery? Why was she told by the Abbot to serve that particular woman? The answer to all these questions is the power of God. The ups and downs of the family, its separation and reunion through events which are apparently unconnected, reveal God's mysterious ways. The girl says it clearly: "By His Graceful wisdom God brought me to this place so that I may serve my mother who so deeply loves me."¹⁵² Yet previous to this reunion, the girl was convinced that she was "unlucky."¹⁵³

What is important, however, is to know why God finally opted for the reunion of the family. Mekonen is as specific as he can be: the suffering and penitence of the mother explain the choice of God. Hence his conclusion: "Dear reader, this novel shows that suffering invites grace and that the persistent will and faith of human beings lead them where they want to go."¹⁵⁴ If indeed suffering brings about a recasting of fate, this extraordinary belief of the Ethiopians in God's justice can hardly be equated with fatalism. The most we can say is that the story's "moral" is that no other means exist to obtain God's favor than suffering, penitence, and supplication.

According to the author, what he wrote is a tragedy. He is thus unaware of the impossibility of creating a tragic character in the Ethiopian context. In the Western understanding, the struggle of the tragic hero against his destiny arouses sympathy, even if defeat is the outcome. From this sympathy has risen the Western requirement that human beings should control their destiny. Mekonen recommends the opposite, not however in the sense of resignation, but in the sense that protest and rebellion will only call for harsher ordeals. Submission to God through suffering and supplication and reliance on His justice are the best means to reach one's goal.

The possibility of obtaining grace through suffering and submission pervades all the works of Mekonen. Take, for instance the play, *Yedem Demtse* [*The Voice of Blood*]. As the title indicates, blood has a voice; it appeals to God, cries for His mercy. The play dramatizes the martyrdom of Abuna Petros, the head of the Ethiopian Church, killed by the Italians during the occupation. Not only did the Abuna refuse to cooperate with the Italians, but he deliberately wanted to become their victim so that his suffering and death, turned into a sacrifice, may plead for God's mercy. According to the Abuna, the occupation of Ethiopia by the Italians is due

to the loss of God's favor, itself caused by the sins of the Ethiopians. He asks: "For how long Jesus Christ, my master, are you going to remain indifferent and let the enemy trample under foot the throne of your beloved David because of our sins?"¹⁵⁵ The appeal is addressed to the Ethiopians as well, since the purpose of the sacrifice is also to unite the Ethiopians and to urge them to fight. After the death of the Abuna, an Italian says: "Who can untie a unity which has been cemented by blood?"¹⁵⁶

The necessity of otherworldliness is stressed in all the works of Mekonen. Thus, in the novel *Salsawi Dawit* [*King David the Third*], we have the portrait of a prince who wonders how he can rule now that he is acquainted with religious and philosophical views and that "everything appears utterly vain"¹⁵⁷ to him. Interestingly, otherworldliness is also introduced as a necessary condition for wise government. Since laxity of moral standards and the pursuit of pleasure undermine ruling elites, no government, Mekonen maintains, can be wise unless asceticism becomes its major virtue.

In *Hasabna Sew* [*The Human Being and His Thoughts*], the author deals with the nature of *idil*. Each person has his/her own fate, allotted by God. Nobody, not even kings, should try to usurp the fate of another person, for it is God's wish and order. "If *idil* could be obtained by shrewdness," argues Mekonen, "God would have nothing to do. Do you know that when *idils* are acquired by shrewdness they do not last?"¹⁵⁸ The question is related to the weakness of human beings. Their incapacity to resist their desires, especially sexual lust, disturbs God's allotment. Thus, King David the Third will desire the wife of one of his generals and bring disaster on himself. It is too late when, finally understanding that he is a nonentity without God, he murmurs:

I am nothing, just a small worm
I had the throne because of You
If God takes away what He has given
Tears and protest are improper
When man makes God angry by his sin
He has nothing else but distress.¹⁵⁹

What has been said so far about Ethiopian traditional art and literature is enough to give a fair idea of Ethiopian values. The relation of these values to the survival of Ethiopia should also be clear. We can now deal with the other side of the problem of survival, namely, the question of moderniza-

tion. A nation so passionately riveted to survival should, at first look, be readily open to modernization, patent as it is that modernization alone can ensure its survival in the modern world. To all appearances, such was not and still is not the case. This study would be severely truncated if no attempt were made to explain why Ethiopia failed to equate modernization with survival. The next three chapters, accordingly, all endeavor to account for the paradox of Ethiopian underdevelopment.

Chapter Five

SURVIVAL AND MODERNIZATION

The assumption that Ethiopia, owing to its stubborn will to survive, should have espoused modernity all the faster is based on a reasoning that equates modernization with survival. According to this equation, the greater the resolution to survive, the more ardent should become the drive towards modernization. This identification of modernization with survival is underpinned both by facts and by theoretical considerations.

There is no need to give here a detailed account of a theory which I have discussed at length elsewhere.¹ Let me simply say that facts related to the history of developed countries weigh heavily in support of the thesis. Whatever is said about the social and ideological changes that have fractured the history of the West, the general outcome—that is, modernity—is more often than not perceived as an outgrowth of a tradition made up of Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman heritages. The events which triggered the modernization of the West, namely the Renaissance and the Reformation, are conspicuously defined as the discovery and revival of the Greco-Roman legacy. “The recreation of the classical world was to be the superb innovation and ideal of the modern,”² observes Perry Anderson. What is more, among the non-Western nations, only those countries which have maintained and used their own tradition have succeeded in developing. Such is the case of Japan, whose cultural identity was all the more preserved as it escaped colonization. Recent studies³ of East Asian countries readily associate their economic growth with the legacy of Buddhism and Confucianism. These facts suggest that the question of development is wedded to the issue of identity, obvious as it is that people can scarcely become active, inspired, and creative if modernity either shatters their identity or fails to gratify it. Before it is poverty, underdevelopment is loss

of identity, neither more nor less. Put otherwise, other than through the revival of tradition, which is then what we call modernization, the possibility of weeding out underdevelopment is equal to zero.

We arrive at the same conclusion if, following such a scholar as W. W. Rostow, we attribute industrialization to "reactive nationalism."⁴ Rostow uses this concept to define the effect of the early industrialization of Britain on countries which were either overtaken, like France, or late comers, such as Germany, Japan, or Russia. These countries embarked on a resolute course of industrialization inasmuch as they perceived the growing material power of Britain as a threat. Striking on the salvational meaning of modernization, Rostow writes:

Men holding effective authority or influence have been willing to uproot traditional societies not, primarily, to make more money but because the traditional society failed—or threatened to fail—to protect them from humiliation by foreigners.⁵

The link between survival and modernization could not have been better defined.

If so, the case of Ethiopia is still highly paradoxical. Here is a country with an impressive record of endurance but still ranked among the poorest in the world. Worse, by getting entangled in problems accumulated by its failure to modernize, the very existence of the country is now questioned. What remains of its identity is lived through as traditionalism, as a negative attitude to modernity. Either the theory equating modernization with survival is not correct, or else solid and sound reasons must be found to account for the reluctance or inability of Ethiopia to modernize. This may mean a serious decline, deterioration of its survival power, or a radical incompatibility with modernity on the part of Ethiopian traditional values and social system. Let us first see whether this last possibility is defensible.

OBSTACLES TO CHANGE

A systematic and thorough study of the incompatibility of modernity with Ethiopian traditional system is still wanting, although partial observations on the question have appeared sporadically. In particular, books on the subject written during and after the revolution of 1974 claim knowledge of the real causes of Ethiopian societal retardation, as though the irruption of

the revolution had revealed the root evil from which the whole society was suffering.

Addis Hiwet gives a clue to the understanding of the problem. He begins by rejecting what he calls "the isolation argument" according to which the protracted isolation of Ethiopia from the outside world worked "to the detriment of its social progress."⁶ The geographical features of Ethiopia are, we know, often held responsible for its isolation, and hence for its retardation. Thus, Christopher Clapham defines the geographical features as "standing obstacles to its [Ethiopia's] development in the present."⁷ Robert Hess is equally affirmative: "These natural obstacles worked in the past to sustain Ethiopia's political isolation and made it difficult for Ethiopia to maintain contact with the world beyond its immediate neighbors."⁸ Commenting on the dual nature of the geographical setting, at once protecting and isolating, C. F. Rey notes that "Abyssinia has enjoyed—or suffered—the effects of remoteness."⁹

Addis does not accept this argument for two reasons. By portraying Ethiopia as "an intrinsically defective society," in full agreement with "racialist theories,"¹⁰ the thesis implies that civilization had to come from outside. Moreover, it echoes "the real fallacy of the isolation"¹¹ of Ethiopia. This last point is a serious objection: as we saw, at the same time that scholars speak of isolation they also point to extensive borrowings of Ethiopia from the external world. Thus, the accusation of racism is difficult to uphold, as Addis himself does not come up with a different reproach. Indeed, according to him, the main factors responsible for Ethiopian backwardness are "(1) the long, protracted absence of social peace; (2) the character or the mode of life of the dominant, warrior class; and (3) the slave trade."¹² Do not these factors describe an intrinsically defective society?

Be that as it may, these factors, especially the first two, deserve our attention as they agree with the view of many scholars. For instance, following the same line of thinking, Gebru Tareke states that "Ethiopian leaders have been far less successful in nation building than in state creation and consolidation."¹³ The absence of a culturally and ethnically homogeneous nation is, according to many analysts, the main stumbling-block to modernization.

To be precise, the Ethiopian state has for long represented the interests of one particular ethnic group, the Amhara, with the consequence that the country was torn by constant ethnic tensions and conflicts. This lack of

social peace was broadened and intensified by the southern conquest, which incorporated into the Ethiopian state peoples from different cultural and ecological background. On this ethnic disparity, a wide religious split, the very one dividing Christians and Muslims, is added. The main cause for the revolution and overthrow of Haile Selassie's regime is generally believed to be the economic, political, and cultural dominance of the Amhara. No less a lever than the revolutionary language of class struggle was necessary to move a social reality weighed down by the combination of ethnic and class issues. So deep were the conflicts that the revolution, however radical, succeeded only in intensifying them to the extent of creating national aspirations.

This situation of permanent conflict, not to say war, rendered modernization impossible. A society so sharply divided along ethnic and religious lines will exhaust its strength and energy by internal dissensions, now open, now hidden, rather than embark on constructive efforts promoting national interests. No policy could have a national dimension, the logic of the state being to accumulate and protect the privileges of the ruling ethnic group at the expense of the great majority.

All these practices of exclusion could only increase hostility, leading to peasant rebellions, even to wars waged against the state by national liberation movements, such as the Eritrean, Tigrean, Oromo, and Somali movements. Rather than the image of a nation intent on building development through consensus and power sharing, we have that of a society tearing itself apart. Ethnic conflicts thwarted the institution of democratic norms, so essential to modernization. The revolution aggravated this state of things by unleashing an all-out power struggle, pitting the main ethnic groups against each other to the detriment of national interest and cohesion.

Because of this, instead of the birth of modern and democratic consciousness, forms of ethnic loyalty and the accompanying ascriptive norms and narrow solidarity gained the upper hand, leaving the door wide open to nepotism, corruption, and particularism. If, following Bert Hoselitz, we state that modernity occurs when "the practice of assigning economic role by ascription, or according to status" is "replaced by the standard of achievement,"¹⁴ we are pretty well obliged to admit that the contrary took place in Ethiopia. People were less and less able to refer to objective, impersonal criteria, preferring instead partial and narrow norms. Rather than catching up with modernity, Ethiopia was turning its back on it.

The instability of the political system was another cause for the lack of social peace, and thus for stagnation. No doubt this instability ensured mobility, but its disadvantages far exceeded its benefits. By instituting a permanent power conflict, the political system fostered a culture prone to constant intrigue, mutual suspicion, and clientelism. This, in turn, fortified the ethnic mentality and escalated the power struggle. The effects of the political struggle were particularly devastating because the contest was waged at the highest level: most of the time, struggle for imperial succession among claimants entailed civil wars, further weakening the empire and deepening its backwardness and ethnic divisions. The failure to reach consensus on imperial succession turned ethnic mentality into a way of mustering popular support.

In addition to the ethnic problems and the instability of the political system, scholars have emphasized the hostility of some important aspects of the traditional polity to modern innovations. Of such was the traditional economic organization. The *gebar* system was an economic system as opposed to innovation and improvement as could be. An economic structure in which land was burdened with taxes in addition to being unprotected by private ownership offered no incentive to improve productivity. Thus, in northern Ethiopia, raising output meant for the producer more tax to the state and the *gult* holders as well as greater danger of attracting new claimants to a share of the land so improved. In the south, it signified the hardening of the terms of the lease. In both cases, "the major beneficiaries of increased efforts in investing more or working harder and thus raising output [was] the land owner or the agents of the state,"¹⁵ never the producer himself. This state of affairs discouraged initiative, hard work, and improvement; it also prevented differentiation within the peasantry and thus the progressive emergence of a "propertied peasant stratum" which "would have stood as a middle force between the peasantry and the landed classes."¹⁶ The rise of this middle force would have introduced into the peasantry the invigorating appeal for enrichment by hard work and investment.

How refractory the Ethiopian social mobility was to modernity appears here clearly. The Ethiopian mentality was impervious to the idea of mobility resulting from hard work, investment, and innovation. Resting essentially on war deeds crowned with tax rights, Ethiopian social mobility was not motivated by material achievement. It valued power over people rather than power over things. Moreover, in enlarging opportunities, the

mobility did not alter the structure of the hierarchy, as the rise of one person meant the fall of another. Nor was the gap between classes narrowing: people interchanged places that were otherwise static so that the society was not undergoing an increasing differentiation.

All in all, in obstructing the establishment of feudalism, the landholding system was only impeding the progress of Ethiopia. Under the impulse of the Marxist conception of social progress, recent studies have rehabilitated feudalism, henceforth conceived of as an indispensable stage for the rise of capitalism. According to Anderson, the great advantage of Europe over the other continents has been feudalism. The capitalist potentials of feudalism are revealed by its "*private, noble property in land*,"¹⁷ by "the overall parcellization of sovereignty," encouraging "the growth of autonomous towns," and by the appearance of "a separate and universal Church,"¹⁸ facilitating the rise of secularism and nationalism. In particular, private ownership of land incited owners to have a direct interest in the increase of production, and so to participate actively in the improvement of productivity. Likewise, the parcellization of sovereignty set the stage for the rise of democratic institutions.

The Ethiopian traditional system contained none of these capitalist potentials. Whereas in Europe private property induced feudal lords to raise productivity, the tax system of Ethiopia created a different state of mind. Exclusively concerned with collecting taxes and uninvolved in production, lords were only interested in amassing as much wealth as they could without any concern for prospective investment, owing to the revocability of appointments, to the "insecurity of *gult* tenures."¹⁹ In sum, the system offered incentive neither to the lord nor to the peasant working the land. What else its outcome could be but economic stagnation?

The absence of noble property in land could only increase the hierarchical dependence, thus thwarting the parcellization of power. Having no inalienable rights on which their autonomy could rest, *gult* holders were wholly dependent on their superiors. In this tight hierarchical dependence, autonomous spheres of power and decision could scarcely develop. The Ethiopian traditional system had no leaning towards democratic institutions. Still less could it allow the rise of autonomous towns. In such towns the merchant class prospered in Europe, gradually changing into a bourgeois class. Also in such towns intellectuals and skeptics grew, with their autonomous and critical intellectual activity. In Ethiopia, as was the case

with the grant of tax rights on land, neither towns nor intellectual activity could escape hierarchical ascendancy.

Many aspects of Ethiopian clientelism barred the way to modernity. Consider the case of authority. So highly personalized was authority that it was linked with the person rather than with responsibility. Put otherwise, impersonal and rational norms did not mediate between the superior and the subordinate. The latter fulfilled the whim of the former, and none was accountable to objective and rational standards of achievement. Other than their mutual interests, even the language of rights and duties was inadequate for the arbitration of their relation. The subordinate is rewarded for services which remain as personal as his/her position. In lieu of objective rules, the master-servant spirit pervaded the relations of superiors and subordinates. Evidently, this spirit was not receptive to rationalization, and thus hardly fitted to the workings of a "rationalized, impersonal bureaucracy,"²⁰ such as modernity requires. Nor was it propitious for rational division of labor. So long as positions depended on personal relationships, subordinates could not have any autonomous activity and responsibility. Should they forget that they were serving their patron, they ran the risk of losing their position. "Authority," says Clapham, "cannot be effectively delegated because it is personal to the individual, and any political position, likewise, is essentially a personal position rather than an impersonal office."²¹

The dependence of positions on personal relationships charges authority with excessive deference. The deference is so strong as to stifle all individual innovation and initiative. In the context of clientelism, individual initiative amounts to insubordination, all the more quickly suppressed as it is perceived to be so by the subordinate himself. So rooted is the suppression that even the Ethiopians who are educated abroad, who therefore know how to modernize methods of work, are reluctant to introduce change. They prefer to obey orders, however ill-suited they may be, rather than run the risk of contradicting or even ruffling their superiors. Knowing to what extent rationalized division of labor with delegation of power and dialogue at every level is necessary to make work efficient and accountable, little wonder Ethiopian clientelism has great difficulty in absorbing modern methods of working.

A no less negative derivation of the socioeconomic formation was the prevalence of vertical relations over communal solidarity. The Marxist understanding of class struggle as the motive force of history implies that

the rise of modernity, with its democratic component involving political organizations and trade-unions, is perhaps due more to social struggles than to technological innovations. It is indeed so if we admit that technological innovations have often stemmed from the need to respond to social protests. When ruling classes can no longer extract surplus in the usual way because of social protest and resistance, then they think of raising productivity through technological innovations. Even if the Marxist conception of class struggle is questionable, the fact that a society prone to wage collective struggles is likely to develop democratic practices and rules, thereby accelerating the process of modernization, cannot be denied.

Recall how confidently our study of the traditional social system endorsed the virtual absence of social movements and utopia. Though this absence safeguarded the social unity, seen from the viewpoint of modernization, its effect was most detrimental. The importance of vertical relationships, insofar as it weakened communal interests, has retarded the development of class consciousness and solidarity. In the Ethiopian context, modern organizations, such as political parties and trade-unions, which would be based on common ideological or economic interests, can neither have precedence over client relationships nor function without being constantly distorted by the latter. The fragility of solidaristic movements furnishes the proof that no serious impulse to democratization has ever animated the Ethiopian society. And as Levine reminds us, "modernization is unthinkable without a significant increase in solidaristic sentiments and rationalized organization."²² In effect, the Ethiopians are ill equipped for organizing strikes with the view of defending or obtaining collective rights. The movement quickly decomposes, mostly by the influence of vertical calculations on the part of leaders and influential participants. Above all, the Ethiopians do not feel ashamed or dishonored by the failure, as communal obligations have little value for them.

At the cultural level proper, obstacles to change are as stubborn as or more stubborn than the socioeconomic organization. We have already alluded to the rigidity and lack of creativity of the cultural instance. Such is the power of conservation and authoritarianism that even where people are often easily creative, namely art and literature, the Ethiopians prove to be fond of copying and repetition. The Ethiopian deficiency in creativity is so ingrained that Levine will categorically characterize the book of the Ethiopian thinker, Zera Yeqob, as "a forgery," there being no doubt that

this "very personal and imaginative critique of prevailing orthodoxies"²³ cannot be the work of an Ethiopian.

Refer to the traditional system of education. Though highly valued, yet "education for the sake of inquiry as such or for personal development was never permitted in its program."²⁴ Learning was essentially a rehearsal, a repetition of what has been accepted once and for all and must be transmitted unaltered. Personal inquiry and a critical attitude were promptly discouraged, thus rendering education an effective way of establishing the authority of tradition. When we remember that according to many scholars much of the Ethiopian cultural treasure is made of external borrowings, the so-called Ethiopianization of the borrowings may well have been a mere addition of superficial ornaments. The tendency to rehearsal shows to what extent inspiration was wanting.

This chronic deficiency in creativity places the Ethiopian mentality on the other side of modernity. Not that borrowing is a negative factor; it is rather the opposite. But when, instead of upgrading adaptability and inciting to progressive innovations, borrowing becomes conservatism by imposing the rehearsal of a static model, without fail it denotes a spirit utterly devoid of inventiveness and alien to the need for achievement. Without the need for achievement, no improvement in any sphere of existence is thinkable. It is to be feared that the so-called survival of Ethiopia may be largely due to this scarcity of achievement. The Ethiopians have preserved their tradition simply because they were unable to improve or change it.

Let us not rush to conclusions, however. The Ethiopian dislike of creativity cannot be innate, for much of its inspiration can be attributed to the religious thinking. With its emphasis on unity, the monophysite doctrine of Orthodox Christianity has no place for a dualistic conception of reality. Because the religious and the secular tend to merge, innovation appears as a transgression, a sin calling for divine punishment. For the Amhara mentality, innovation is as much "ineffectual" as it is "immoral."²⁵ Had the separation between the religious and the secular been accepted, no such feeling of immorality would have arisen. In merging the two, the Ethiopians are only siding with the belief of the greater part of humanity. Whether we take Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, or African traditional religions, none advocates a dualistic approach to reality. The Cartesian concept of matter as distinct from spirit and governed by mechanical laws—hence the radical premise of secularism—is an exclusively Western frame of reference.

Sadly, modernity requires the Western kind of distinction between the profane and the sacred. Scientific and technological innovations—the concrete expression of the will of humankind to become master and possessor of nature—cannot materialize unless the physical world is secularized. Only thus can it be manipulated and altered without arousing the sense of sin and the fear of punishment. If the secular world is not subject to God's constant intervention, if it is governed by pure mechanical laws, innovation (that is, dissent) is totally devoid of guilt, even grows into a passion.

Let us go further. Mere technological innovations are not sufficient to generate modern mentality. The innovations must accord with the meaning of modernity: the external world must become the objectification, the mirror of subjectivity, in short "an intelligent world."²⁶ It becomes so when nature is so mastered as to signify the reflection and validation of human potentialities. Only then does history cease to be an arbitrary succession of events or the expression of the interference of divine providence and begin to incarnate the progressive realization of humanity. In conquering nature, human beings are but developing and corroborating their inner drives. The need to validate beliefs and values through worldly conquest affiliates modernity with the scientific mind.²⁷

This kind of thinking never developed in Ethiopia. Though a distinction was introduced in the structure of reality, dualistic conclusions did not follow. The wax-and-gold mentality opted for the maintenance of the dichotomy, arguing that the appearance must be denounced as the cheating, usurping reality. Nowhere do we find, as is the case in the West, any incitement to make appearance conformable to essence. This incitement would have meant nothing less than the rise of the scientific and technological mind, since the obligation of conformity would have prescribed the transformation of appearance in accordance with essence.

The opposite occurred in Ethiopia: the impoverishment of appearance, in the monastic sense, was treated as a sign of great spiritual richness so that worldliness was never reconciled with spirituality. Instead, the poorer the appearance, the closer to spiritual truth. Ethiopian painting embodied this equation in the extreme. It strove not for the harmony of form and content, but for their discrepancy. Contrary to the classical or the Renaissance models, the physical is not where the spiritual can dwell; at best, it can only symbolize, evoke the spiritual through distortions and deprivations. Hence the technical clumsiness of Ethiopian painting, which is the consequence of the refusal to merge the spiritual with the material. Unable

to become an objectification, Ethiopian art was condemned to remain symbolic.

And if only this were all! The Ethiopian notion of *idil* diverts the Ethiopians even further from the path of modernity. Understood as an exclusive allotment, *idil* cannot accommodate a progressive, cumulative conception of reality. In this respect, the absence of utopian social movements in Ethiopia is not surprising. The idea of progress, of a drive towards a general betterment was obstructed by the Ethiopian belief in fate. One had to occupy one's proper place to the detriment of other individuals, the rise of one individual entailing the fall of another. More is not made available, so movement does not upgrade, does not develop reality; rather, it favors the few, the elect. Favoritism cannot think in terms of general and progressive betterment, but only in terms of exclusion and distinction. One is raised from the dust, but the dust remains the lot of the overwhelming majority. Because *idil* singles out and does not expand, time for the Ethiopians is cyclical. It is the wheel of fortune distributing favor and disgrace rather than a progressive and forward movement.

Besides, belief in *idil* is adamant to rationalization. Nothing can be planned, as everything depends on divine will, which human beings cannot control. The Ethiopian notion of fate, we know, has little in common with the Protestant idea of predestination. Whereas the Protestant belief is fraught with inevitability, with the idea of necessity, the Ethiopian notion tilts to the side of arbitrariness, thereby rendering rationalization difficult. For the Protestant, since God has chosen the elect once and for all, fate cannot be altered. All humans can do is to look for signs of their election. The rationalization of Protestantism stems from the conviction that, destiny being unchangeable, one can only try to gain its revelation through worldly pursuit. The arbitrary essence of the Ethiopian notion of fate does not invite any such rationalization.

All the more reason why it cannot do so is the slight consideration that the Ethiopians give to the idea of self-realization. The belief in fate blocks the valorization of self-accomplishment inasmuch as destiny should be the product of God, less so the striving of individuals. Works cannot be the making of destiny, any more than they can be the sign of election. This way of planning one's life, or rather, of shielding it from arbitrariness and occurrence (which, for the Ethiopians, precisely express the power of God) is outright arrogance. The only appropriate attitude towards God is total submission, specifically manifested by prayers, deprivations, and suppli-

cations. The Ethiopians refuse to rationalize life because such a thought seems to go against God's will and absolute power. As sign of divine interference, the element of unpredictability must be maintained at all costs. The belief in rationality (that is, in the attainability of a goal provided the appropriate means are used) is so essential to modernity that a culture inclined to think differently has virtually no chance of becoming acclimated to modern methods.

The chapter devoted to the Ethiopian idea of fate has already explained how the discredit thrown on self-realization cajoled the Ethiopians into extolling warlike values at the expense of material works. The bent for warlike values and the readiness to determine one's place in the society in relation to military prowess rather than to work have devalued productive activities to an alarming degree. And what could be more at odds with the spirit of modernity than this proclivity for martial values? In addition to demeaning productive activities, it stands in the way of a democratic spirit. A society founded on the martial spirit cherishes authoritarianism and power concentration, rather than the democratic rules so essential to modernity. The conflict of military values with modernity has been forcefully depicted in the novel already cited, *Fikre Iske Mekaber*, in the person of *Fitewari Meshesha* who, as we said, did not know what to do with himself and his values in a society where merchants and traders were on the rise.

What then should be said about Ethiopian vanity? Xenophobia and conservatism suckled by vanity are liable to decisively retard modernization. Without denying the importance of nationalism, still, a nation which refuses to learn from other peoples, which even treats with contempt the realizations of advanced countries, jeopardizes its chances of assimilating modern rules and methods. Moreover, vanity deters self-criticism, prelude to any change. In their contact with the Western world, the Ethiopians have long despised all Western achievements with the exception of firearms. Even with firearms, they did not want to know how they were fabricated, but how to excel in their use. The early, non-colonial contacts of Ethiopia with the West would have been very fruitful, were not the Ethiopians so satisfied with themselves. Because of vanity, not only learning, but even asking what made the West so powerful was thwarted. About Ethiopian vanity and conservatism, Plowden has this to say: "So completely have these characteristics taken possession of them, that they are incapable of even imagining an improvement, or of imbibing any single idea beyond what they have inherited."²⁸

For my part, I see a pertinent illustration of this extreme conservatism of the Ethiopians in religious matters. Being so religious, the Ethiopians should have been keenly interested in the new religious ideas, if for no other reason than to fight them. Also periods of purification, reform, and renewal of religious commitment, would have been quite normal. Astonishing as it may sound, however, despite the long duration of the faith and despite constant challenge by Jesuits, Protestants, and Muslims, Ethiopia has never known a period of religious purification and reform. Characteristically, the Western religious challenge was handled not by means of reforms and theological development, but by prohibition and the expulsion of Jesuits. The response was not reformation, but still further isolation. Nothing could awaken the religious anxiety. Even severe periods of famine and national disaster, interpreted as God's punishments, were believed to call for the usual acts of penitence rather than a serious self-examination.

So solidified a faith could scarcely be rationalized. Though a measure of Greek philosophy was known in Ethiopia and a few texts were discussed, no attempt was made to realize some kind of convergence. Granted, religious controversies were raging, but with the aim of staving off any purification and rationalization of the belief. They were sectarian disputes over obscure points of dogma, far removed from the torments of an anxious mysticism in need of renewal. To tell the truth, the religion itself was not a mere belief; it was also identity—and, as such, subject to the law of permanence and inalterability.

In this regard, the story of Zera Yaqob, the thinker, is quite revealing. The impact of the Muslim invasion led by Gagn, the coming of the Jesuits, and the subsequent theological controversies had combined to shake the religious serenity of Zera Yaqob. Events and questions demanded new answers, something like a revision. He thus produced a body of thought that, so he believed, all reasonable Ethiopians could accept. It was a rationalization of Ethiopian Christianity based on mixture of pantheism and transcendence. What was the reaction of the Ethiopian Church? Predictably enough, it went from outright rejection to persecution, so that Zera Yaqob's appeal for revision was of no avail.

In brief, a society that never feels the need to purify and deepen its primary commitment will not be flexible. The one space through which modernity could have been inserted was the religious realm. Here was a passion which had to be defended at all costs, a passion for which the

Ethiopians would prostrate themselves just to know how firearms were made. Despair dawns when we see how obstinately this passion rebelled against modernization.

Let it be added that, besides structures, circumstances too did not favor the change of Ethiopia. Take the southern expansion. It contributed as much to the survival of Ethiopia as to its stagnation. First, the southern expansion revived the old warlike values at the time when the emergence of the values of invention and production was equally crucial. Second, it gave too much confidence to the ruling elite to the point of veiling the need for change and reform. The purchase of firearms was all that was sought, and the southern conquest provided the necessary resources. Had Ethiopia been confined to the expanse of the kingdom of Tewodros and Yohannes at the height of the scramble, it would have certainly felt the need to secure its independence by other means than the purchase of firearms alone. The necessity to produce modern weapons had already dawned on Tewodros, as witnessed by the trouble he took to manufacture his celebrated canon. To all appearances, the southern conquest stifled a thought in the process of growing.

THE MODERNIZING ASSETS OF THE TRADITIONAL POLITY

So far analyzed, the obstacles to modernity are quite strong. But so too were the modernizing potentials inherent in the traditional society, as examined in the previous chapters. Since the most important obstacle to Ethiopian modernization is believed to have been the lack of social peace, let us begin with that.

As discussed in the previous chapters, no sooner have scholars expatiated on ethnic feuds in Ethiopia than they feel obliged to emphasize Ethiopian nationalism. Indeed, seeing the protracted survival of the country, it is highly unlikely that ethnic conflicts dominated more than the sense of unity. But, the objection goes, this situation has changed since the incorporation of the south. Ethnic conflicts notwithstanding, the sense of oneness had prevailed in the north. The annexation of the south was unusual: peoples of different cultural background with dissimilar histories and ethnic origins were incorporated without any prior process of assimilation so that a completely distinct situation was created.

Since what I have to say about the alleged incorporation of different peoples has been discussed in the chapter dealing with colonialism, there

is no need for a detailed argumentation. Suffice it to say that the southern expansion does not differ in nature from the history of the north. The expansion of Aksum towards the south, which gave birth to northern Ethiopia, was realized by the conquest and assimilation of indigenous Cushitic peoples, just as the southern expansion, with maybe the notable difference that the Semitic element had diminished to the point of extinction. To quote Tadesse Tamrat,

it is precisely in this characteristic pattern of a few south Arabian or sabeanized individuals moving far into the interior and assuming political and cultural leadership among the Kushitic people of the Ethiopian region that one can best envisage the origin and the eventual expansion of the embryonic state organization long established in northern Ethiopia.²⁹

Therefore, the southern expansion does not present any particularity; it is the continuation of a process started long ago, with almost the same goal—conquest and integration.

In the light of the ancientness of Ethiopian expansion, what is interesting is less the circumstances of the expansion than its goal. For the expansion, being conquest as well as integration, raises the question of knowing what the nature of Ethiopian identity must be to absorb peoples so diverse. More than ethnic conflicts, the remarkable thing about Ethiopia is the successful conquest and integration of indigenous populations. Those scholars who focus on ethnic strife overlook this aspect of the question, and so adopt a unilateral approach. Instead of trying to understand why an expansion which proved successful in the past began to totter during the process of modernization, they treat ethnic conflict as a fixed structural problem of Ethiopia.

The true issue lies in the very nature of Ethiopian nationhood. Previous chapters have indicated how alien Ethiopian identity was to lineage ideology. Its two pillars, Orthodox Christianity and the imperial system, were based neither on lineage nor on linguistic community. Because of these characters, we labelled it as super-tribal. The universalist aspect of the religious dimension opened Ethiopian identity to all peoples, regardless of their ethnic origin. The allegiance to the throne, to a central authority over regional particularities, laid the foundation of the state. The combination of these two factors—that is, a universalist ideology delineated by a political contour—defined Ethiopian nationhood. Isolation and syncre-

tism adorned this identity with peculiar, native traits in which pagan and Judaic elements stood out. The statement that "over the centuries . . . the highlands have developed as a melting-pot for cultures"³⁰ rings strikingly true.

It becomes readily apparent that such open and definite nationhood is particularly adapted to modernity. It allows regional particularities while ensuring effective integration, such as is proper for a modern nation. The very fact that the dominant ideology is not tribal evinces the degree to which it can lend itself to a modern interpretation. In Africa, tribal ideology, the cult of ancestors, and the lineage system tended to perpetuate divisions and effectively precluded the formation of larger unions of people, but no such factors hampered the Ethiopian state. Ethiopia survived because throughout its history the national ideology was stronger than ethnic sentiments.

Let us be more specific. In trying to define Ethiopian nationhood, we endorsed Clapham's notion of the plasticity of Amhara identity. This notion explained why the Amhara were able to conquer and assimilate other peoples. Not being subservient to lineage criteria, their identity gave birth to the core culture which integrated other groups. The modernizing potential of this Ethiopian identity is clear: in giving more weight to values than to descent, it facilitated larger integration, just as it contained the possibility of evolving universalist and achieving criteria. Unlike the tribal identity, which remains ascriptive, the Ethiopian identity accords people a better chance of being judged by their performance than by their descent affiliation. Let it not be forgotten that modernity consists of the preference accorded to achievement over descent and status. The merger of ethnic groups into modern nations was precisely what forged those rich, universalist, and impersonal criteria.

The formation of modern nations can follow either the French or the German path. Generally speaking, in the former the state creates the nation, in the latter the nation creates the state. But this difference of method need not blind us to the fact that both ways invent nations because they obey the same injunction: the dissolution of ethnic ideology in favor of the mentality of the citizen or the individual. The less that national consciousness is granted an innate status, the greater the impact of the cultural and historical templated nationalism. In other words, the nation is not the continuity, not the natural evolution of ethnicity; ethnic nationalism is a caricature of nationalism because it does not fulfill the main criterion of a mod-

ern nation, i.e., the definition of people in accordance with rights and duties as individuals and not as members of an ethnic group. This criterion requires the detachment of the individual from mere ethnic bonds, making him or her the member of an impersonal order. Though both ethnicity and nationalism seem to champion attachment to a transcendent group, the essential difference lies in the conception of the group. Ethnicity sees the group as an exclusive and protective order, while nationalism sees it as an impersonal and normative one.

Because the idea of a modern nation expresses not so much membership of a closed group as partnership in an impersonal order, it is best defined by Rousseau's notion of social contract. In the idea of contract there is indeed the understanding that rights and duties are not derived from the sharing of common blood, or common traits and customs, but from partnership governed by contractual, impersonal rules. Modern nationhood is defined less by the ethnic element than by the degree of individualism—that is, of impersonalization of rights and duties—which is achieved. In fact, the ethnic element is maintained in order to exalt this achievement. It then becomes an historical continuity, less as a principle of social organization than as a subject of achievements made up of internal realizations and records of sovereignty.

Only in Africa and in other ill-inspired Third World countries do we see the extravagant attempt to build nations on the basis of tribal ideology and organization. The attempt ceases to be surprising as soon as we understand that ethnic nationalism is the last shelter of traditionalism. Instead of forwarding the cause of individualism, the idea of nation becomes a tricky way of preserving traditional privileges and values. People are asked to champion their ethnic membership, less so their individuality, still less their universal rights and duties. Whereas the idea of nation is conquest of new rights and duties, that of ethnic nationalism is immersion in the past.

This reactionary content of ethnic nationalism is masked by the use of democratic concepts, such as self-determination, equality, etc. Yet it is hardly democratic to claim rights derived from ethnic membership at the expense of individuality. And since individualism emerges by gaining ground on ethnic restrictions, people cannot have both without radically altering their tribal identity. When they do this, they become a nation, that is an association more governed by universal, impersonal rules than by the ties of common blood or common traits. The truth is that the more a society is demo-

cratic, the wider is the governance of impartial rules and the less important become ethnic references. The best way to generate this impartial national consciousness is the integration of different ethnic groups, since the latter cannot come together without devising impersonal rules. The challenge of nation-building in the Third World is precisely the exhortation to impersonal consciousness.

These considerations indicate the extent to which Ethiopia was well placed to foster modern nationalism. For the traditional Ethiopian identity, people were Ethiopian not because of their ethnic affiliation, but because they were members of a supra-tribal community represented by the Church and the imperial throne. This nationalism was not modern, however: the idea of citizenship, of the association of individuals was singularly missing. Even so, compared to tribal ideology, the transformation of this supra-tribal identity into modern nationalism was considerably less difficult. Indeed, the main thing, namely the generation of a loyalty over and above ethnicity, was already secured.

So much was this the case that the first effect of the southern conquest was the dissolution of kinship structures in the south. This dissolving power of Ethiopian identity was exercised by the *gebar* system, which connected people vertically rather than horizontally. The patron-client relationships establish between people relations which are not those of kinship. People are associated more as tax-payers and collectors, masters and servants, leaders and followers, than as kin. Because they are so associated, they grasp their relations in terms of individualism. When the southern conquest is accused of having "feudalized," Amharized traditional groups, the complaint is correct, even if its cause is not right. Chiefs became *gult* holders and behaved as state representatives eager to collect taxes. Even the principle of seniority suffered from this transformation: chiefs began to behave *vis-à-vis* their kinspersons more as a distinct class than traditional chiefs. In so behaving, they were actually developing class solidarity with the Amhara conquerors. Intermarriages and Christianity will progressively erase the little difference still existing between the conquerors and the traditional chiefs. The introduction of the northern system in the south has, according to Hoben, "enabled peoples conquered by the expanding Amhara kingdom's armies to become Amhara rather than remain ethnically distinct, economically disadvantaged, and politically disaffected subjects."³¹

The generation of a class structure and class solidarity offered to local chiefs and ambitious individuals the advantages of the Amhara conquest.

Conquerors were not separated from the conquered by exclusive rights, and what the former had was not refused to the latter. That is why the southern conquest has little in common with European colonialism and its indirect rule. Local chiefs were not maintained or raised as intermediaries; rather, they were wholly Amharized. This was possible because nothing in Ethiopian identity could prevent people, be they free persons, conquered, or slaves, from becoming full members of a community which was by definition non-parochial and non-racist. Neither race, nor lineage, nor any natural or cultural trait could bar them membership. The Amhara can be accused of assimilating peoples by belittling their original identity, but not of discriminating them because of this initial identity. That this power of assimilation flows from the supra-ethnic identity can hardly be denied, any more than the modernizing potential, the power of impersonalization of this identity can be denied.

Another important modernizing force of the traditional system was social mobility. All students of modernity agree to define modernity by the prevalence of social mobility. The order of achievement replaces the order of ascription when mobility controls the social system. Only then can the places occupied by people be ascribed to their individual merit rather than to status, be it due to seniority, birth, lineage, or confession. As reiterated in the previous chapters, mobility governed the Ethiopian traditional social order. Positions were appointments, not hereditary rights, and as such depended on service to the state. Even though the criteria controlling the mobility were not modern (in that they were exclusively conditional on political and military services to the detriment of production and inventiveness), nevertheless the idea of making positions into rewards for individual merits was at work. This idea enabled the integration of non-Amhara individuals into the ruling elite, just as it instituted a form of competition which was—if not in content, at least in spirit—modern. At any rate, it could be more easily funnelled into the way to modernity than would be the case for static traditional systems. Even if the landholding system did not encourage increase in productivity and the appearance of an economically active lordism, the spiritual condition affixed to it was favorable for such an evolution.

War has been indicated as one of the major causes of Ethiopian backwardness, stimulated as it was by social mobility: destructive by definition, war is also demeaning of the values of productivity, inventiveness, and democracy by the promotion of warlords to higher positions—in short, a

society centered on war can only breed brutality. Facts, however, do not support this one-sided judgment on war. World history associates great periods of invention and change with war. More than anything else, human inventiveness was and still is spurred on by war. The beginning of modern science is so closely tied up with the needs of warfare and conquest, such as those related to navigation and firearms, that it has been said that "war on the continent of Europe provided the principal motive force for change between the end of seventeenth century and the Revolution."³² Countries that possessed new means of warfare became powerful, while latecomers scurried to acquire the mastery of those weapons. Seeing the British advance, for instance, other European countries followed suit. The term modernization refers primarily to this impulse to catch up with Great Britain. Germany and Japan are the prime examples of rapid industrialization driven by the need to counter external threat. The organic link between nationalism and modernization³³ in fact arose precisely from this need to master new weapons of warfare.

Concerning modernity, a warlike society is, therefore, in no way at a disadvantage. The need to possess powerful means of war activates modernization even as it fosters a modern outlook by subjecting the values of war to the criteria of worldly success. The endowment of the economic sphere with the glory of battlefield (competition, victory, sacrifice, nationalism, etc.) is enough for the warrior class to read into economic activity a refurbished expression of its own traditional values. This will certainly render the transition to modernity easier, perhaps even exciting. In this regard, Ethiopia was not handicapped: it had all the opportunity to change its warrior class into a modern capitalist class. The ethic was there; one had simply to aim at the right target.

We should insist on the nature of this warrior class. If our argument linking modernization with nationalism is correct, then the Ethiopian transition should have been greatly alleviated. Many scholars used the terms "xenophobia" and "religious fanaticism"³⁴ to describe the Ethiopian nobility. Given these characteristics, the class would have adopted modernization with enthusiasm, were it convinced that modernization alone could ensure its own survival and that of the nation. For so understood, modernization means more than the defense of class interest and the enjoyment of modern life; it becomes identified with the fulfillment of duty in line with the traditional spirit. Bolstered by the sense of obligation, modernization would have followed the right path and culture change the easiest course.

The implication of obligation would have fomented the correct interpretation of wealth accumulation. That trade activity and the merchant class were despised in traditional Ethiopia was no disadvantage inasmuch as merchant mentality is little inclined to capitalist methods and norms. Rather, reflect on the fact that in traditional Ethiopia the privileged avenue to personal wealth was political appointment, itself a consequence of war deeds. Here was an important condition for the rise of modern mentality, for wealth was not a goal, but a reward for achievement, a validation of personal merit. Analyzing the psychological motive for capitalist accumulation, David C. McClelland defined the need for achievement by the "desire to do well, not so much for the sake of social recognition, or prestige, but to attain an inner feeling of personal accomplishment."³⁵ In other words, capitalist wealth accumulation became possible the day the essential purpose of wealth coveted neither the satisfaction of greed, nor the need for prestige, far less the pursuit of enjoyment. What separates the merchant mentality from the capitalist is this interpretation of wealth as personal accomplishment, as validation of personal values and beliefs. Because of this interpretation, the capitalist becomes a person who accumulates wealth for the sake of wealth accumulation. As the need for personal accomplishment is conditional on the sense of duty, which alone can inspire an action in which, to quote Kant, "no account is taken of its utility,"³⁶ let it be admitted that, in this regard, Ethiopia was well placed. The conception of wealth as a reward for services to the state, therefore the justification of its acquisition in terms of duty accomplishment, did not need to be generated.

In the same vein, another traditional trait of Ethiopian society blamed for causing its retardation—i.e., authoritarianism—was actually an important asset to achieving modernity. The superficial opposition of democracy to authoritarianism views the latter as a serious obstacle to change. Once again, world history does not confirm this analysis. The countries which modernized were authoritarian societies, in fact the most puritan of them taking the lead. Especially, studies of modernization have highlighted the importance of authoritarian child-rearing in the breeding of an achieving mentality. The more authoritarian a society, the greater is its potential for fostering achieving individuals. Such is, for instance, the analysis of Emmanuel Todd:

[The] family systems that possess high potential for cultural development have as one of their necessary components a certain authoritarianism within the parent-child relationship which—on the ideological plane—rules out their close adherence to liberal values.³⁷

The Protestant world, the Jewish system inherited by European countries through the adoption of Christianity and, outside Europe, Japan and Korea provide concrete cases of authoritarian family structure. Where the concept of the austere family is most wanting is in Africa and Muslim countries, due essentially to the practice of polygyny and the subsequent withdrawal of the role of mothers. Authority is decisive because no transition to modernity is thinkable without the sense of discipline, dedication, and leadership respect.

Interestingly, Todd remarks that "there is just one region in the world where families are egalitarian-nuclear in structure but not of European culture: the Christian part of Ethiopia."³⁸ Consequently, in view of the importance of authority and leadership in Ethiopia, had Ethiopian leaders been convinced of the advantages of modern changes, the whole country would have followed without the slightest hesitation. A pertinent illustration of this is the story of the eucalyptus tree in Ethiopia. Imported by Menelik, this tree "has come to dot the Amhara countryside."³⁹ The rapid and general adoption of this foreign tree has one explanation only: Menelik's authority. He was convinced of the advantages of the tree, so was the whole country. While an authoritarian society may fear change, it can also accept it all the faster if the leadership is advising it. "In the conservative society of the Amhara, authority also provides the major source of impetus for change,"⁴⁰ says Clapham.

The relative success of modern education is a further significant instance of the role of authority in Ethiopia. In view of the traditional contempt for foreign novelties, one would have expected Ethiopia to have difficulty in accepting and generalizing modern education. In reality, of all the modern changes, education has received the most enthusiastic welcome. The strong endorsement of modern education, first by Menelik, then by Haile Selassie, explains the social acceptance. Besides giving support to modern education by creating new schools, many of Haile Selassie's speeches were pleas for its rapid adoption. For example, one of them said: "We call upon all Ethiopians to send their children to the nearest school, for, it is suicide and a crime against responsibility which God places in all

parents not to educate one's own children."⁴¹ The response was quick to follow: "Even bearded and senior men push their way into the schools, humbly but determinedly anxious, like their children, to learn English."⁴² So enthusiastically was the imperial exhortation accepted that performance in school was immediately enhanced in terms of traditional canons of war-like values. *Gobez*, which meant bravery in war, was extended to the school, as though the latter had become a battlefield where the best strove for distinction.

Because the imperial plea had changed modern education into a duty and school achievement into a form of prowess, it gave full vent to the traditional mentality. Obedience to dissident superior orders, first seen as transgression, is construed as a blessing as soon as material rewards follow. Just as was the case with the adoption of the eucalyptus tree, the material benefits that accrued from modern education became signs of divine blessing approving the imperial infringement. The religious and the political thus fused, resistance to modern education amounted to a sin.

In addition to facilitating the acceptance of change through obedience, authority inserts the condition for showing dedication. One does not simply obey, one also aims for performance. Change turns into a duty for the accomplishment of which people are vying. In not being confined to mere interests, a change of this nature invites enthusiasm by creating the occasion to be worthy of the leadership.

No doubt, the place of women helped authority to be firmly rooted in Ethiopian families. Since the more authoritarian the family, the higher the place of authority in society, the authority of families becomes effective only when it rests on fathers as well as on mothers. A family in which the role of the mother is disparaged in favor of the father is deficient in authority. If children lack respect for their mother because she is not treated properly in the family, this means that the person from whom they learn most of their values and beliefs does not possess the necessary halo of authority. The defect of polygyny is precisely the generation of an imbalance of authority within the family. Not so with the structure of the Ethiopian family, as it leant towards the preservation of a balanced authority. Thus, "with regard to the ownership of land and moveable property and the right to institute divorce the wife is very much the equal of her husband."⁴³ Likewise, "there are examples in Ethiopian history where women have played decisive roles both politically and economically."⁴⁴ Even though the term woman is not free from all pejorative connotation, by far it is used

to express that which is "particularly energetic and efficient."⁴⁵ What is most revered is the dedication of women, as confirmed by the unrivalled place of the Virgin Mary in Ethiopian worship.

In fact, the status of women has been instrumental in facilitating Ethiopian expansion and integration. The bilateral nature of the Ethiopian family enabled children of a foreigner married to an Ethiopian woman to have *de facto* Ethiopian nationality. Ethiopian emperors have often utilized this contingency to marry themselves or their close followers to important families of limitrophe ethnic groups. A swift integration was thus possible, as the children of such marriages were accorded Ethiopian status and could claim *rist* rights in the heart of Amhara territory.

Close also was the affinity of the Ethiopian traditional notion of power with the spirit of modernity. In a hierarchical society, power was, of course, the center of the entire social fabric. Some scholars concluded that the Ethiopian society was as far removed from the democratic spirit as anything could be. They overlooked another facet of the problem, namely the nonhereditary status of power in Ethiopia. True, problems of succession led to constant conflicts, but the idea that power is not innate—that, being an object of competition, it had to be deserved—sounded modern. One had simply to change the criteria of the contest by substituting popular suffrage for war deeds in order to ensure a smooth transition to modern practice.

The same can be said about the central belief in *idil*. We rejected as spurious the interpretation of this belief in terms of fatalism, given its role in social mobility. *Idil*, we argued, functioned like a calling urging individuals to be more daring and ambitious. Though not identifiable with what is called the deviant mentality because of a deficiency in creativity, yet the *idil* mystique possessed some of the aspects of deviancy. In fact, a more open and differentiated society, such as modernity is, would be quite suitable for *idil* searchers.

Even as regards creativity, there is no cause for alarm. Granted that what scholars say about the predominance of borrowings is true, still more that vanity prevents the Ethiopians from learning and being critical of themselves, the fact remains that they are also very sensitive to failures. Besides, without some propensity to pragmatism, they could not have survived for so long. Thus, in view of the powerlessness of their traditional weapons, they were quick to learn the impact of firearms and to adopt them. Likewise, the Ethiopian framework with which they have natural-

ized their borrowings indicates a certain propensity to *creativity*, however subdued it may have been. Moreover, the tendency to Ethiopianize what they borrow reveals a syncretic power which ought to assist the transition from tradition to modernity. Already attested by the absorption of various cultures and peoples, the power of syncretism shows how little secluded the Ethiopian mentality actually is. Surely, the absence of sectarianism should greatly favor modernization.

To conclude, while it is true to say that some of the attributes of Ethiopian traditional life were inimical to modernity, they were many more that were quite supportive of it. Hence, the backwardness of Ethiopia, its inability to achieve modernization, stands out as an enigma. I see no better way to resolve this enigma than through a comparison between Japan and Ethiopia; no doubt, such a parallel will indicate where Ethiopia went wrong.

JAPAN AND ETHIOPIA

A comparison of pre-1935 Ethiopia and Japan before and during the Meiji Restoration runs the risk of being content with superficial similarities. So wide appear to be the differences between the two countries, including the circumstances of their evolution, that whatever similarities may otherwise exist are bound to be considered incidental and insignificant. Thus, the Ethiopian historian Shifferaw Bekele contests the seriousness of such a project, arguing that the Ethiopian elite had only superficial knowledge of Japan and its modernization:

I see it written that Japan served as a 'model'. This word is not helpful because it gives the wrong impression. The knowledge that the so-called Japanizers had about Japan's westernization was at best elementary That *westernization* meant total overhaul of state and society including its mores and values, eating habits, dress and lifestyles was not at all realized. Most thought in terms of superficial changes.⁴⁶

Another historian, Bahru Zewde, while admitting some analogies, thinks that the social and technological gap between the two countries was so unbridgeable that the model of Japan "remained a subjective urge unsupported by the objective reality."⁴⁷

Why, then, do I insist on bringing up the issue when at best it can only be a mistaken resemblance? Because I believe that much can be learned

about the causes of the Ethiopian failure to modernize if the concept of the Japanese model is taken seriously. True, as Shiferaw suggests, serious studies of the Japanese model were not made by Ethiopian intellectuals. Neither did the Ethiopian leaders show any determined will to follow the model, aside from superficial references. Nonetheless, despite their shallow knowledge, some Ethiopian intellectuals and political leaders were amazed at how similar conditions were between the two countries. Unlike Bahru's assumption, the similarity of objective conditions explains why some Ethiopians referred naturally to Japan. The reference was less the product of a conscious adjustment to a model than the recognition, almost instinctive, of a common objective legacy.

The failure of Ethiopia, it follows, can be imputed more to the lack of political determination than to the inadequacy of the objective reality. It was due to a subjective error, caused not so much by the inappropriateness of the objective condition as by a faltering political will. While Japan pursued systematically and with great determination the necessary course of action, Ethiopia did not. What was a natural course appeared as a model when the failure of the will aroused the exhortations of disappointed, demoralized intellectuals.

Let us try to determine with precision the concept of the Japanese model. The concept was coined by Addis Hiwet with a very precise meaning. Analyzing the Ethiopian ruling class after Menelik's death, Addis distinguishes two main trends: "the ultra feudalists—represented by such grand conservatives as Taitu, Habte-Giorgis, and Balcha and the liberal or enlightened feudalists—represented by Tefferi and his corporate group."⁴⁸ However, there was a third group, by far the most advanced, the group of the "Japanizers" who saw in the transformation of the post-Meiji restoration of Japan "a living historical model for Ethiopia: the liquidation of feudalism, and the development of capitalism through the agency of the modern state—i.e. a revolution from above."⁴⁹ Interestingly, these Japanizers did not belong to the ruling class; they were "passionate and radical intellectuals"⁵⁰ who had had the opportunity to study abroad. They were Afework Gebre Yesus, Gebre Hiwot Baykedagn, Worqeneh Martin, Gebru Desta, to name but a few. Though distinct from the group of Teferi (Haile Selassie), the Japanizers allied themselves with Teferi in order to fight the ultra-conservatives.

So defined, the concept of Japanizer does confirm my view that Japan became a model once Ethiopia was known to be on the wrong track. Es-

essentially confined to the tiny educated circle, the movement aimed at correcting the trend. As such, it offers little interest indeed, being but a marginal, superficial, and as we shall soon see, theoretically and politically ill-advised group. Where the notion of model becomes interesting is when we consider the attempts made by ruling circles to safeguard Ethiopian independence through reforms and the appropriation of Western technology. Tewodros and Menelik were undoubtedly set on this course of thinking. It was not a theoretical movement, but an option induced by the survival power of traditional Ethiopia. Reforms were perceived as necessary, even if they were not clearly spelled out. Above all, European weaponry was perceived as vital for survival—survival here meaning the subsistence of traditional Ethiopia, that is, of its religion, values, ruling class, and social structure.

According to me, this theme of survival in itself authorizes a serious and theoretically fruitful parallel between Ethiopia and Japan. Actually, Addis's definition of the Japanese model by such changes as "liquidation of feudalism" and "revolution from above" is most misleading. The definition empties the comparison of all meaning, if only because it ignores the fact that, in Japan's modernization process, "ethics and social philosophy remained thoroughly Confucian and thus feudal,"⁵¹ and that "the great motive force in Japanese modernization was the threat of absorption or destruction by the West."⁵² Only when the survival of a traditional elite is admitted to have been the main motive of Japanese industrialization can the parallel with Ethiopia become meaningful. The problem deals less with the attitudes of intellectuals than with the options of a traditional polity when faced with the threat of Western colonialism.

Need we insist on Tewodros's modernizing ethos, especially on the closeness of his inspiration to the Meiji Restoration? As summarized by Sven Rubenson,

Tewodros perceived as did none of his predecessors among the *mesafint* that the political anarchy, moral laxity, and technological backwardness of his people threatened national survival. The reforms he announced, the policies he tried to implement, the very single-mindedness and perseverance with which he tackled the problems, indicate that he aimed at nothing less than a national revival combined with the transformation of his country into a modern state.⁵³

Tewodros spoke in terms of restoration of the traditional polity, but such that it would counter the colonial threat. In no way was modernization equated with Westernization; rather, it was a survival option designed to endow the traditional polity with new material means. Tewodros's attempts to constitute a standing army, to introduce a separation between Church and state, to reduce the landholding of the Church, to institute Amharic as a national language, to build roads and bridges, and to centralize administration, are inseparable from his fanatical attachment to traditional Ethiopia, to its religious values, nobility, and imperial system. The reforms were perceived as necessary to salvage what was most precious and essential. They were infringements serving the higher cause of rescue, not radical views disparaging Ethiopian values and social fabric as rotten and obsolete, any more than they were meant to replace traditional values by Western ones. Reforms were sacrifices, prunings for the purpose of national revival, such as only higher fidelity could require. An inner evolution of the Ethiopian system rather than revolution was contemplated. Most of all, Tewodros's determination to steal Western technology, as evinced by his attempt to manufacture firearms in Ethiopia, was a quite Japanese inspiration.

The same spirit has animated Menelik's approach to modernization. He too wanted to strengthen the state through some centralizing measures and the construction of roads and networks of communication. He understood the importance of modern education and, to that end, opened the first school where the highest dignitaries were urged to send their sons. He was also "supremely interested in weapons and generally intrigued with machinery and technology," with the view of possessing "for himself and his people the power which resides in the white man's knowledge of things."⁵⁴ All this was desired for the purpose of restoring the grandeur of Christian Ethiopia. The nationalistic interpretation of modernization and not, as is now the case, the desire for Westernization, brought Ethiopian leaders close to the Japanese path. Incidentally, Haile Selassie's decision to adopt a constitution which "was in many respects a faithful copy of the Meiji Constitution of 1889,"⁵⁵ adds an argument to the thesis since, however superficial the knowledge of Japan among Ethiopian leaders may have been, it was enough to inspire them. Haile Selassie's preference for the Meiji constitution, if properly analyzed, would certainly reveal the choice of a development model centered on the need to salvage much of the traditional system.

Modernization understood as a way to ensure survival and rescue tradition is, therefore, the strong point in favor of a parallel between Japan and Ethiopia. Even if the means adopted proved to be different, the same spirit doubtless inspired both countries. Just as Japan wanted to appropriate Western technology to safeguard its independence, values, and social system, so too have the Ethiopian leaders nursed the same goal. It implied the project of modernizing without social revolution, in the sense that it should come from above, but also that it must avoid wrecking tradition. I call the Japanese model of this project "modernization without Westernization" or, if you will, "the enterprise of salvaging tradition." Modernization is not expected to come from a revolution, from the overthrow of a class by another class. Nor is it the product of acculturation or Westernization. It is not an aspiration, but a duty, an obligation to tradition. Focusing on modern weaponry, it is a rescue mission, no more no less.

Let us now turn to the objection according to which this comparison does away with the chief issue, that is, with the far-reaching reforms undertaken by Japan, whereas no such kind of reformist policy was ever planned, let alone applied, in Ethiopia. That is what Marcus notes: though Menelik had heard of Japan and was stimulated by its example, "he opposed the thoroughgoing economic and social transformation that would be inspired by industrial revolution."⁵⁶ Why did Menelik oppose, or at least not feel the need for a radical transformation while being animated with the same spirit? Answering this question is knowing why the same goal opted for divergent courses of realization. Since structural differences between Japan and Ethiopia are believed to have caused these divergent developments, let me unravel the similarities shared by the two countries.

The important point is, of course, that both have escaped colonization. Seeing the imputation by most scholars of underdevelopment to the fact of colonization, the preservation of their sovereignty is no small matter. The possibility of indigenous development being conditional on the maintenance of independence, the Japanese model could not have been more appealing than to Ethiopia. But for the threat of colonialism to generate the will to modernity, it requires a past of imperial glory, which creates the fascination and attraction of Western technology while preserving the attachment to tradition. Only then is the fear of being colonized surpassed by the desire to become the peer of European countries. Change then takes the clear form of restoration of past glory. Colonialism contests a place previously held; industrialization is the way to regain that place. In

this way, the West is as much a threat as it is a challenge. This spirit of challenge and competition renders colonization all the more unbearable.

Modernization appears as restoration, a reinstatement of past glory because, as one Japanese scholar declared, the "best way to look forward is by looking backward."⁵⁷ It is the best way inasmuch as the future becomes not so much an aspiration as a duty, the obligation to retrieve one's place. This dialectic explains the contempt for the West and the fascination for its technology, both being expressions of the desire to appropriate the technology while preserving one's identity. More than the lack of technology, what handicapped most colonized countries was their failure to foster early the ambition to acquire it. Firearms were introduced all over the world before colonial conquest. Yet in most places they were used for mercantile purposes and not against those who introduced them. In this regard, a past of imperial glory is quick to induce the desire because new, efficient weapons do no more than stimulate a traditional leaning towards glory and expansion.

Heruy Wolde Selassie, the Foreign Minister of Haile Selassie, in his book written in 1924 after his official visit to Japan, notes that Japan and Ethiopia have in common uninterrupted and ancient dynastic rules⁵⁸ as well as a spirit of fierce independence and isolationism.⁵⁹ They also share many identical values, especially as regards warlike virtues.⁶⁰ A similarity is also observed in their recent history, as both emerged from a state of anarchy caused by the supremacy of princes over the imperial authority.⁶¹ In both countries, in their determination to modernize, emperors took the initiative⁶², for instance, by according a new constitution to their people, and by supporting the expansion of modern education. Heruy, summarizing his views, writes: "in many respects, what Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia and Emperor Meiji of Japan did is comparable."⁶³

A more detailed account would find a similarity in the mystical aura of emperorship in both countries. Granted that the two imperial systems were not totally alike, especially in their religious frames of reference, nevertheless the unity of the political and the religious endowed the emperors of both countries with unrivalled authority. In both societies, hierarchical authority was the foundation of the social fabric, even if the Ethiopian class system never reached the solidification of a feudal society. Likewise, a traditional type of nationalism, predating colonialism and centered on the defense of faith and social system, was the active and permanent drive of the political organization. Nor was the perception of similarities in past

glories and present defiance confined to Ethiopian and Japanese circles. It was felt in Europe, especially after the victory of Adwa. Hess quotes a Paris journal, *La liberté*, which, after the victory, editorialized: "All European countries will be obliged to make a place for this new brother who steps forth ready to play in the dark continent the role of Japan in the Far East."⁶⁴

My eagerness to highlight affinities will certainly not convince those scholars who remain skeptic, inclined as they are to consider such similarities insignificant in comparison with the differences. The striking difference is, of course, the social and technological gap existing between Japan and Ethiopia. "Even before the Meiji restoration," reminds Bahru, "Japan had attained a higher stage of social development than Ethiopia in the twentieth century."⁶⁵ Before the restoration, agriculture was in the process of being commercialized, and urbanization, with a fast-growing merchant class, was already on the move. The parcellization of power inherent in Japanese feudalism better favored modern political developments than did the Ethiopian system. Put otherwise, very much like European countries, Japanese society possessed the necessary prerequisites for a successful transition to capitalism. Such conditions were not visible in Ethiopia, so that, unsupported by objective forces, the attempt to imitate Japan was actually quite unfeasible.

Perhaps the strongest argument is the one pointing to imponderable differences in the very process of modernization of the two countries. Whatever the similarities and differences they shared, Japan was rapidly involved in a thorough social transformation while Ethiopia barely went beyond measures of centralization. By causing a deep social change, particularly the destruction of the feudal order, Japan's radical measures accelerated the development of native capitalism. Ethiopia, however, shrank from altering the social system: apart from measures aiming at strengthening the state through greater centralization, the reforms of Tewodros, Menelik, and even Haile Selassie have purposely avoided radical social changes. The imperviousness of Ethiopian system's to capitalist penetration thus maintained, modernization was condemned to be ill-sorted and superficial. Nothing, then, demonstrates better the incomparability of the two countries than the different attitudes of their respective leaderships to modernity. Despite their nationalism and the threat of colonialism, Ethiopian leaders never acted as radically and consistently as their Japanese counterparts.

Insofar as this consideration puts subjective factors above objective conditions, it posits the problem in the only way it can receive a satisfactory answer. For, in clinging to the idea of the inappropriateness of Ethiopian objective conditions to the growth of capitalism, scholars absolve Ethiopian leaders. Worse, they deprive themselves of the opportunity of understanding the factors that still hamper the modernization of Ethiopia. Because the same problems persist, albeit in a different form, they produce the same effect: the delay of modernization. A better approach is gained if we assume that, given the necessary determination, Ethiopian leaders would have certainly succeeded in making the required reforms, thus removing the persistent problems. This possibility cannot be excluded, given the vividness with which foreign threats were discerned. As happened in Japan, the will to reform should have sprung from the need to salvage tradition, comprising among other things the class position and interests of the ruling elite itself. So the question is: What melted the determination of Ethiopian leaders? Specifically, why was the sense of threat changed into confidence, advising the postponement of reforms?

The main reason, as I see it, for the softening of the reformist determination is the southern conquest. It gave confidence to the ruling elite, particularly after the victory of Adwa. It instilled in Ethiopians "a false sense of self-sufficiency and ill-prepared them for the greater danger of the 1930's."⁶⁶ Marcus is even more specific:

The ease with which Menelik had obtained weapons led Ethiopians to conclude that the nation would always be able to purchase war supplies from eager salesmen. The leadership did not consider it necessary to build up an arm industry, with all the modernization and reorganization of society that such an effort would involve, but was content to foster the development of government and the traditional economy through the introduction of communications such as the railway, telephone, and telegraph.⁶⁷

Even if Haile Selassie will find other reasons for deferring radical reforms, in the main he will follow the same reasoning.

Chapter I grappled with the problem of finding the real meaning of the southern expansion, which was found to have been an anti-colonial move designed to increase substantially the defensive power of the traditional polity. The southern expansion was indeed effective in discouraging, even in defeating colonial designs. Now is the time to reveal the other side of the

conquest: the overconfidence of the ruling elite, leading to the deferment of necessary reforms.

With respect to the resolution of Ethiopian leaders to stand up to colonial powers, however, one question deserves serious consideration: Were Ethiopian leaders as fearful of the colonial danger as Japanese leaders were? Not that they were not conscious of the threat as such, but rather it took them some time to conceptualize it. Even once conceptualized, it was mitigated by cultural proximity. Ethiopia being a besieged Christian country, the first reaction of Ethiopian leaders has ever been to consider Europeans as allies. Tewodros thought so and openly expressed "the hope that Britain would help him to modernize his country."⁶⁸ Christianity created such a cultural affinity between Europe and Ethiopia that the Ethiopian elite was inclined to think that, rather than colonizing Ethiopia, colonial powers would want to help it modernize. Menelik too had difficulty in understanding why Italy would desire to colonize a Christian country. No such consideration ever crossed the minds of Japanese leaders. The cultural gap between Japan and Europe was too great to allow anything other than a stubborn and resolute defense of identity.

This argument will not take us very far, however. Though cultural estrangement was universal in the colonial world, yet the Japanese response was unique. Moreover, Ethiopian leaders were promptly awakened to the illusion of alliance by the inexorable logic of colonial conquest. Even if the cultural closeness did lure them for a while, it did not fool them. So the harder the awakening, the stronger should have been the resolution to modernize in order to counter the colonial threat.

This brings us back to the southern conquest. It is the main cause for the retardation of Ethiopia: the so-called social and technological advance of Japan can hardly be a sufficient reason for Japan's success. China was at a level of social development comparable to Japan; it too suffered humiliations caused by Western powers and fostered a similar urge to emancipation. In spite of these coinciding conditions, China did not follow the Japanese path. Reproducing the Ethiopian experience, it even slipped into underdevelopment. So, the political will is just as decisive as, if not more decisive than the social stage. The important issue is to know why and how the will was prevented from adopting a radical course of action.

The paradox of Japanese modernization is that a conservative class introduced radical changes for a no less conservative purpose, namely, the preservation of the traditional ideology and system of power. In fact, all the

social transformation was inspired by one basic aim: the production of modern weaponry. The more we wonder how a conservative class could so behave, the clearer becomes the absence of other options. More exactly, the survival ethos of the ruling class could rely on no other option to achieve its goal than to initiate reforms which, however untraditional and detrimental to the ruling elite, were necessary to save what could be and deserved to be saved. They were properly sacrifices for the purpose of rescuing the essential goal. Had Japanese rulers other options, such as the conquest of new territories, or the prospect of new resources, allowing them the purchase of firearms, they too would have probably shunned the antagonizing reforms. This does not mean that the Japanese elite was simply driven by the absence of choice. The case of China showed the existence of another option as well as the irreplaceability of human decision and willingness to accept sacrifices. Japanese leaders opted for the most difficult but, in the long run, the most rewarding course. Herein lies their unique merit.

Ethiopian rulers were also confronted with various choices. Naturally, they chose the easiest way, the one entailing the least change and sacrifice. The condition for survival was the upgrading of military capability. Given additional resources, the hard way of manufacturing modern weapons—with all the attendant far-reaching social changes—could be exchanged for the much easier course of purchasing weapons. The case of Tewodros provides enough evidence of this imprudence. Because Tewodros could see no other way out of the danger than by the manufacture of firearms, he was driven towards the Japanese logic. Still loath to expand the empire in order to muster additional peoples and resources, he was, so to speak, cornered within the limits of traditional Ethiopia from which he could hardly squeeze more surplus to buy weapons. Given the situation, what else could he do but to increase production? And this policy would mean reforms and the introduction of new methods—in a word, resolute modernization.

Tewodros failed—or, rather, ran out of time—to nurture and launch the project. His irascible character, so little inclined to compromise and concession, his precipitation, and his intolerance of Islam and the Oromo, partially explain his failure. Characteristically, the need for more surplus led him to expropriate land from the Church, which is believed to have been an important reason for his downfall. Still, the persistence of the danger and the absence of credible alternatives would have coerced Ethio-

pian leaders into admitting the need for reforms. To all of them, including the Church, the dependence of their power and influence on the survival of Ethiopian independence would have become more-or-less imperative.

It was, precisely, this evolution that was totally obstructed by the southern conquest. The problem of obtaining more surplus to purchase firearms having been solved—it was assumed—by the immense prospects of the southern march, there was no reason for change, no need for reforms. Rapid Ethiopianization and Christianization of the southern populations, accompanied by the creation of a southern elite embedded in the state, were all that was needed to make additional peoples and resources available to the Ethiopian state and ruling elite. The traditional tax rights on land and the sale abroad of exportable products were enough to purchase a sufficient amount of modern weapons.

The choice of expansion rather than industrialization in the face of colonial threat, therefore, differentiates Ethiopia from Japan. The Ethiopian option was most natural and predictable. Conquest was in the very logic of the traditional system. As a revival and exaltation of its warlike values, it was liable to seduce traditional lords. Most of all, conquest had the incomparable advantage of not requiring change and reforms. Only the absence of any other alternative would have compelled the Ethiopian ruling elite to generate more surplus internally, and such a course would have been most arduous and unnatural. But the decisive reason for never taking this course was the victory of Adwa in which Ethiopian leaders found the ultimate validation of their option.

Granted that the southern expansion stopped colonial advances, the fact remains that it did not remove the threat altogether. As would be demonstrated by the Italian invasion of 1935, the solution had obvious limitations. The mere possession of firearms could not enable Ethiopia cope with a more organized and highly equipped modern army. How then account for the continuous postponement of modernization, despite the increased threat to Ethiopian independence, during the rise and consolidation of Haile Selassie's regime? Haile Selassie knew that "as far back as 1925, Mussolini was making the initial plan for the conquest of Ethiopia."⁶⁹

What if, by the time Haile Selassie rose to power, all the Ethiopian potential for modernization had melted like the snow? If so, even if the Ethiopian leadership was aware of the danger, it was too late: the path of change and reform was definitively blocked. The main reason was no

longer overconfidence, but a negative structural change due partly to the incorporation of the south, partly to the circumstances related to the rise of Haile Selassie. I would define this negative development by the rise of autocracy, better still by the identification of modernization with autocracy.

Marcus situates the premises of this evolution just after the victory of Adwa. Menelik's

tendency towards autocracy became more pronounced after 1896. Whereas previously he had rarely made decisions without the advice of his major *makwanent*, after the Battle of Adwa he acted independently. He alone was the Ethiopian state.⁷⁰

To be sure, the prestige of the victory as well as the important resources of the south made the state—the imperial throne—increasingly independent and self-reliant. Neither regional lords nor other traditionally admitted forms of power devolution could counterbalance the authority of the central government. By means of slow but cumulative centralizing measures, regionalism and with it the Ethiopian nobility were progressively undermined. We thus arrive at the real, structural cause of the Ethiopian failure to modernize: the progressive marginalization of the nobility.

The great obsession of Ethiopian emperors since the end of the Era of the Princes, with perhaps the exception of Yohannes, has been centralism. The essential target of the "modernizing" reforms undertaken by Tewodros, Menelik, and especially Haile Selassie, has been the strengthening of the central government to the detriment of regional power. While this evolution was understandable both in terms of avoiding relapse into the anarchy of the Era of the Princes and of preparing the ground for modernization, it has nevertheless generated—contrary to the traditional order—a grave imbalance of power in favor of the monarchy. Certainly, centralization is necessary for modernization, but not autocracy which only turns into an obstacle to modernity.

Among the scholars who discussed the reasons for the failure of Ethiopia to follow the Japanese path, Kifle Selassie Beseat is of the opinion that "the explanation lies largely in the sequence of historical events . . . and not in any cultural or human factor that might predetermine the failure."⁷¹ Convinced that Menelik "followed a bold policy of modernization from 1889 to 1913, as did his contemporary in Japan, Emperor Meiji-Tenno,"⁷² Kifle, somewhat contradicting his thesis, isolates as a major complicating

factor the conservatism of the two main religions of Ethiopia—Christianity and Islam. He also underlines the absence of political stability:

Whereas Japan has had only three emperors (including Hiro-Hito) since 1868, succeeding one another peacefully on the throne, in Ethiopia, between the death of Tewodros II in 1868 and the abolition of the monarchy in 1975, seven emperors had ascended the throne, following an armed struggle in each case.⁷³

The third and most important factor, according to Kifle, is the unwillingness of Ethiopian leaders to apply radical reforms:

Whereas the Japanese monarchy accepted a modern parliamentary-type Constitution as early as 1889, the successive emperors of Ethiopia never displayed the political acumen to do so, thereby hastening their own downfall and, what is more, preventing the country from becoming really modernized.⁷⁴

Marcus too, in addition to emphasizing the lack of radical reforms on the part of Ethiopian leaders, attempts to detect the factors which prevented them from adopting a radical approach:

The Ethiopian people were not so disciplined as the Japanese; the empire was newly established and its administration still rudimentary. Capital resources were limited, and there were relatively few skilled and educated Ethiopians who played a significant role in political and economic life.⁷⁵

Interestingly, Marcus adds the capacity of the empire to maintain the status of the warrior class so that "there was no structural danger from an impoverished warrior class, such as had developed in Japan."⁷⁶ This is indeed an important reason, given the widespread thesis according to which the decline of the Samurai and the resulting withdrawal of status respect⁷⁷ are responsible for their conversion into a capitalist class. If anything, by creating the possibility of maintaining the warrior class, the southern expansion had averted the disaffection—and thus the change—of the Ethiopian nobility.

All these reasons overlap and their contribution was not negligible. Still, there was no obstacle that a determined will to reform could not have

overcome. As suggested by the above-quoted authors themselves, the great difference between Japan and Ethiopia was the low degree of commitment of Ethiopian leaders to radical reforms compared with that of the Japanese leadership. And if we ask what it was that weakened their determination, the answer is the same: the southern conquest. More than social retardation, political instability, or lack of educated elite and capital, the absence of forces pressing Ethiopian leaders to realize reforms explains the postponement of radical modernizing measures. Surely, no one changes unless there is reason for doing so.

From the southern conquest also grew the premises of imperial autocracy. By providing fresh and important human and material resources for the defense of Ethiopia, the southern conquest could not but encourage the abnormal, tentacular growth of the central government, thus paving the way for autocracy. The inevitability of this evolution becomes evident by reference to the traditional conflict between centripetal and centrifugal forces. When modern means tend to promote a traditional longing, they are adopted all the faster. Such was the frame of mind of Haile Selassie. Greater resources, modern means of centralization, copied from and supported by the West, enabled Haile Selassie, with the help of a relatively educated group, first to tip the balance in favor of the throne, then to break down the power of the nobility. A perfectly autocratic system was thus born, all the more defiant as it boasted of its modernizing mission in the face of the reactionary stance of the nobility.

In effect, most scholars situate the divergence between Japan and Ethiopia in the question of state power. While the Meiji constitution provided the Japanese monarchy with a modern parliamentary system, no such trend was perceptible in Ethiopia. This omission was the more significant the more slavishly Haile Selassie's constitution imitated the Meiji constitution, except on "the question of civic liberties and the power of the emperor vis-à-vis the legislative body."⁷⁸ Whereas the Japanese political system increasingly tended to turn the emperor into a mythical figure, the Ethiopian system went in the opposite direction by concentrating all executive, legislative, and judicial powers in the monarch. This evolution can be accounted for in terms of political will and choice rather than in terms of social and cultural gaps.

Addis's classification opposing the ultra-conservative class of the nobility to the relatively progressive camp of Haile Selassie should therefore be revised. Some scholars even go so far as to describe Haile Selassie's

group as a radical progressive camp, thereby implying that the conflict between Haile Selassie and the nobility was merely the struggle between modernism and conservatism. The opposition to the rise of Haile Selassie was surely inspired by traditional ideas, but in no way does it follow that these ideas were reactionary. How could they be so when they aimed at preserving the traditional balance of power between the throne and the aristocracy. Of Balcha, the notorious leader of the camp opposed to Haile Selassie, one author observes:

Characterized often as a reactionary xenophobe, Balcha, as a Teferi antagonist, was a pious Orthodox Christian convert of Gurage origin, an excellent administrator and soldier, and an Ethiopian nationalist who at heart felt his opponent was selling the country to foreigners.⁷⁹

For Ethiopia to develop a parliamentary system, the first condition was doubtless the preservation of the traditional structure of power. A modern parliamentary system could easily grow from the traditional balance of power between the imperial throne and the aristocracy. Modern democratic ideas could take root in Ethiopia only in the soil of traditional practices; they could not be transplanted fully grown from outside. But with the progressive marginalization of the nobility and the growing strength of the monarchy, the possibility of introducing in the constitution clauses on civil liberties and power sharing was irremediably jeopardized.

What was highly abnormal in Ethiopia was the complete withdrawal of the nobility from the process of modernization. In Japan, the split of the aristocracy between a conservative sector and a modernizing camp was the proof that a significant sector of the aristocracy was actively involved in the process of modernization. No such split occurred in Ethiopia: the entire aristocracy was labelled as conservative and reactionary, whereas Haile Selassie and his careerists were considered progressive. So general a characterization smacks of manipulation. The conservatism of the aristocracy was not negative either, since conservatism changing into nationalism would have rather compelled the class to accept reforms. No, the wholesale defamation of the Ethiopian aristocracy was simply a means of justifying Haile Selassie's determination to marginalize the nobility in order to realize his autocratic design.

The project of keeping the Ethiopian nobility out of the process of modernization, therefore, differentiates the Ethiopian option from the Japa-

nese model. The Japanese path was designed to salvage the traditional system and thus to preserve the ruling elite, from the higher aristocracy to the lower Samurai. This meant two things: the transformation of the traditional values of the ruling elite into a capitalist drive and the assumption by the same class of the leadership of modernization. The opposite process took place in Ethiopia. Far from being transformed, the nobility, increasingly considered as an incorrigible reactionary class, was stripped of its power so that it sank into oblivion. State servants, educated or otherwise, but utterly devoted to Haile Selassie, were the happy substitutes.

Contrary to the "reforms" of Haile Selassie, changes in Japan were meant not so much to exclude the nobility as to force its conversion to modern methods and values. Take the abolition of feudalism. As one author pointed out, "in Japan, feudals are abolishing feudalism. In so doing, they are of course changing themselves into another class."⁸⁰ Indeed, the loss of income caused by the removal of feudal rights in Japan compelled the feudal class to recover it by using modern methods. Such was not the intention of Menelik and especially not that of Haile Selassie, who were rather distributing land and tax rights to their warlords in the south. This might seem a way of showing solidarity with the nobility; in reality, it was blocking the nobility's evolution. And as the state progressively assumed the military and administrative role that traditionally had devolved upon the nobility, these grants were insidiously transforming the whole nobility into a parasitic class. Nobles became absentee landlords, cut off from their power base and having no specific social responsibilities. What other terms than bribe and corruption can express the right accorded to nobles to appropriate and consume a surplus in the production of which they did not play the slightest role? The image of a parasitic, useless, blood-sucking class could not have been better mounted. That the practice of compensating the nobility by undue economic privileges for its political and administrative erosion led, first to the degeneration of the class, then to the downfall of the monarchy itself, should come as no surprise.

EARLY ETHIOPIAN INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT

My interpretation of the Ethiopian failure to modernize is corroborated by the turn taken by the early Ethiopian intellectuals known as "Japanizers." Beyond differences in accent, all of them shared two interrelated prin-

ciples: an iconoclastic attitude towards the nobility and the call for the autocrat. As one Ethiopian scholar notes:

called 'Japanizers' or the 'young of Ethiopia', these precursors of the radical civilian elite of the 1960s and the 1970s held government positions that required modern education and backed Haile Selassie in his drive to adopt progressive policies which were opposed by the traditional nobility.⁸¹

The official myth being that Haile Selassie was modernist and the traditional aristocracy reactionary, the correct political attitude was to support the former and undermine the latter. In so doing, the "Japanizers" gave Haile Selassie's rise and consolidation a decisive ideological boost. Knowing the great gap separating Haile Selassie's policy from the Japanese model, their being called Japanizers is, therefore, the product of an appalling confusion. One cannot be a Japanizer while fomenting the destruction of the traditional elite.

Let us begin with Afework Gebre Yesus, as his evolution is indicative of the confused attitude of the so-called "Japanizers." A great admirer of the West, especially of Italy, Afework ended up by becoming a staunch collaborator of the Italians during their occupation of Ethiopia. This unspeakable treason requires explanation, particularly as he had ardently desired the modernization of his country. He has been as much a severe critic⁸² of the backwardness of Ethiopia as a fervent admirer of Ethiopian history and values. To characterize his attitude during the Italian occupation as "opportunism"⁸³ is, to say the least, debatable. Afework was rather a tragic and contradictory character who saw no incompatibility between his admiration for the West and his commitment to Ethiopia. Most probably, he desired for Ethiopia what he admired in the West. His tragedy stemmed from his desperation: the Ethiopian ruling class, he believed, was unable to initiate any kind of reform. Hence his belief in the civilizing mission of colonialism and his readiness to collaborate with the Italians. The patriots who were fighting against the Italians were for him nothing but reactionary groups intent on preserving backward Ethiopia. Their fight was less patriotism than resistance to change. The interpretation of Alain Rouand according to which (as summarized by Bahru) Afework "chose to serve the Fascists out of frustration at the lack of progress in his country,"⁸⁴ is thus a defensible position.

It is so for two reasons. Once the Ethiopian elite has been labelled as irremediably reactionary, Afework's position appears consequent. More importantly, Afework believed as much in the capacity of Ethiopia to seduce, change, and absorb the invader as he did in the civilizing mission of Italy. This belief is expressed by the prophetic content of his novel, *Tobbya*. Indeed, if the novel is read as a symbolic expression of Ethiopia's problem of modernization, then the might of the pagan king, his love for Tobbya, and his subsequent conversion to Christianity point to Ethiopia's power to domesticate and transform European might. This meaning transpires in Tobbya's response to the king's poem:

What has Tobbya done, except to marry a king?
 Millions of Amhara hosts dispersed before him;
Rases and Dejasmacthes were reduced by him;
 He disposed many powerful kings;
 No weapons of war overpowered him.
 People trembled at the news of his approach.
 He crushed oxen into pieces.
 No chain was strong enough to harness him
 He was literally a lion, an uncontrollable lion
 But now he is tame, and tied down by a *Mateb*.⁸⁵

Just as King Solomon was seduced by the beauty of Makeda, as a result of which Ethiopia became the elect of God, European might too is bound for the same purpose of promoting Ethiopia. In this sense, *Tobbya* is a new, modernized version of the *Kibre Negest*. In the same manner that Ethiopia became the heir to Judaism and the guardian of Christianity, it will make the best of Western might and technology, provided it welcomes the West and uses its God-given gift to tame the mighty invaders.

Evidently, Afework was totally unaware of the true nature of European colonialism. His belief in the civilizing mission of the West is based on a false analogy with past cultural intercourse. But there is one thing to his credit: he is consistent. He was not alone in postulating the civilizing mission of Europe; he was simply more logical, for, as Bahru admits, "while some of them [the first group of Ethiopian intellectuals] may have fleetingly considered foreign rule as a way out for their country's backwardness, few went as far as Afework did."⁸⁶ And if Afework did cross the threshold of treason, was it not out of greater desperation, as only great love can inspire? In no way does this mitigate or excuse his treason, but it

does indicate the tragic dilemma in which the first intellectuals were caught, convinced as they were of the impossibility of inner modernization, hence obliged to flirt with colonial powers. At any rate, all this demonstrates the remoteness of the early intellectual activity of Ethiopia from the inspiration which impelled Japan. The same urge to find external models would incite the intellectuals of the 60s and 70s to fashion Ethiopia according to the Soviet or Chinese model: that was no less treason with, unfortunately, even more disastrous effects than Afework's delirium.

Among the "Japanizers," the most famous is undoubtedly Gebre Hiwot Baykedagn, who seems to understand modernization as a salvational undertaking. In view of Japanese achievements, he criticizes the soft reforms of Menelik, arguing that Menelik "did not understand that his people will disappear unless it embraces European civilization."⁸⁷ He attributes the backwardness of Ethiopia to the lack of social peace and pleads vigorously for replacing the values of war with those of knowledge, reflection, and work.⁸⁸ His ardent wish to see Ethiopia modernized inspires him to severely criticize its archaic beliefs and customs and to make the creation of a modern system of education⁸⁹ the keystone of his program of reform.

Whether the reforms proposed by Gebre Hiwot were sufficient or not is not our concern here. What we want to know is to whom his discourse is addressed. His emphasis on education marks his goal to "produce an elite," a "task . . . incumbent on the state."⁹⁰ The underlying argument for the creation of this new elite is the hopelessly archaic and conservative nature of the nobility and clergy. Far from trying to modernize the nobility, he wants to replace it straight out with educated state servants. Indeed, Gebre Hiwot holds a powerful grudge against the nobility, mainly because it despises intellectuals, to the point of accusing them of being spies for colonial powers.

Because his reformist discourse excludes the Ethiopian nobility and clergy, Gebre Hiwot has no other choice than to call for an autocrat. According to him, explains Richard Caulk,

the sort of ruler Ethiopia needed was a man of order, energy, intellect and experience . . . who is both a friend of Progress and Absolutism. Initially he welcomed *Lej Iyasu* as this enlightened autocrat . . . disillusioned with Menelik's heir [he] switched allegiance to Iyasu's cousin, *Dejazmach* Teferi Mekwennen (the future Haile Sellase. . . .)⁹¹

We need not hesitate: the seeds of the autocratic rule established by Haile Selassie's constitution of 1931 are found in Gebre Hiwot's thinking. Yet in creating and popularizing the need for an autocrat against the reactionary clergy and nobility, he was turning his back on the Japanese path. And as was the case with Afework, the same hatred of the Ethiopian elite trapped him into speaking "in glowing terms of the recovery under British colonial rule"⁹² of Sudan, even though he was more aware than Afework of the evil consequences of colonialism. Incidentally, Ras Hailu of Gojjam, a traditional leader if ever there was one, was much more far-sighted when, commenting on the achievements of British colonial rule, he said to a British traveller: "you have done a great deal for Egypt . . . but you have not taught her to do anything for herself."⁹³

The great merit of Gebre Hiwot is to have understood that unless Ethiopian culture and faith are renovated, modernization cannot be successful. He wanted to get out of the paralyzing conflict between tradition and modernity by refurbishing tradition. For him, tradition should neither be compartmentalized nor replaced by Western borrowings: it had to pass through the ordeal of renovation and achieve a renaissance. So, alongside the European subjects, such as mathematics and foreign languages, he proposes the teaching of traditional beliefs once they are renovated. This is done through the teaching of the Bible, the mastery of Amharic, the knowledge of Ethiopian history and the *Fetha Negest* (*The Chronicle of the Judgement of the Kings*).⁹⁴ But this merit is greatly diminished by his inability to grasp the impossibility of renovating and saving the culture without the renovation of the ruling class supporting the political and cultural system. Had Gebre Hiwot embarked on this course of thinking, no doubt he would have discovered the secret of Japanese modernization.

The Ethiopian intellectual who came as close as possible to the Japanese thinking was Heruy Wolde Selassie. Both by his position as Foreign Minister in Haile Selassie's Cabinet and his traditionalist temperament, Heruy was very keen on the idea of change from above. None of his views indulge in invective against the nobility and the clergy. They advocate culture change but in the context of preservation. In not calling for a new elite, they assume that, given the proper leadership, the Ethiopian nobility and clergy are able to modernize.

In fact therein lies the problem: Heruy shut his eyes to the question of leadership, to the essential difference between Haile Selassie's policy and the reforms of the Meiji government. In his book on Japan, he compares

Emperor Meiji now to Menelik, now to Haile Selassie, thus veiling the gap between Japanese radical reforms and the timid changes introduced by Ethiopian leaders. In thus endorsing the view that Ethiopia was following the Japanese way, he was but confusing (deliberately, it would seem) Haile Selassie's autocracy and the Meiji government. Instead of a complaisant and laudatory identification of Haile Selassie's regime with the Japanese government, Heruy's concern should have been the clear demarcation of what remained to be done to follow the Japanese model. This would have cost him his post, probably his freedom; it would at least have shown that he deserved the name of Japanizer. The more he "admired Japan for its ready adoption of modern civilization, while retaining the nobler aspects of its ancient culture, and naturally envisioned a parallel development in Ethiopian,"⁹⁵ the more he should tell how significantly the Ethiopian evolution departed from its model.

Though a latecomer, the Ethiopian intellectual who, after a serious study, proposed Japan's modernization as a good model for Ethiopia is Kebede Mikael. Among his books we find such titles as *Ethiopia and Western Civilization* and *How Did Japan Modernize Itself?* In the latter, besides studying the Japanese way and the reasons for its success, Kebede is comparing Ethiopia with Japan with an eye to detecting the causes of the Ethiopian failure. He stresses the military inspiration of Japanese industrialization, derived from the need to preserve independence and national identity. Two attributes explain the success: unity and determination. In Kebede's words,

they [The Japanese] have reached their goal of developing their country because the emperor, the government, important leaders, and the people in general, united by one spirit and will, worked with admirable enthusiasm and determined leadership."⁹⁶

According to Kebede, Ethiopia can and must follow the Japanese model because it shares many characteristics with Japan, such as the imperial tradition, a long history of independence and isolation, and a warlike spirit. Kebede admits the social and technological advance of Japan, but does not take the retardation of Ethiopia as a handicap. Japanese advance being due to early communication with the outside world, there is no reason why Ethiopia will not reach the same level rapidly, now that it is open to the external world. Moreover, the great endowment of Ethiopia in natural resources constitutes a serious advantage over Japan.

No, the only reason which prevented Ethiopia from moving as fast as Japan was the dearth of unity and determination. Owing to disunity and lack of determination, the period from Tewodros to Menelik elapsed without appreciable gains. "Had Ethiopia worked with determination during these times, it would not have exposed itself to the Fascist invasion,"⁹⁷ remarks Kebede. In fact, he repeats the same question: "What else but inaction precluded Ethiopia from following the Japanese path?"⁹⁸ By inaction he means specifically the lack of radical reforms of the type which shattered feudalism in Japan. Instead of showing the same determination, the Ethiopians were continuously "arguing and fighting with each other" on matters related to "property, personal life, and internal affairs."⁹⁹

The real cause of these internal quarrels and conflicts is yet to be specified. Rather, Kebede's book relates the conversation of a Japanese father with his two sons. Faithful to his feudal values, the father does not like the new inclination of his sons towards business. Their answer could not have been more specific: "What sword used to do in your time, now money does it And the swords of today are called cannons, rifles, ships, and cars."¹⁰⁰

Kebede's question should have been: Why was a similar mental evolution blocked in Ethiopia? Was it not because Ethiopian leaders thought that they had enough resources to buy modern weapons thanks to the incorporation of the south? Was not their inaction due to the fact that they were not hard pressed as Japanese leaders were? Moreover, has not the southern conquest revitalized the traditional bellicose spirit, thus obstructing the evolution of the values of war into the values of business? The revaluation of the aggressive spirit was responsible for the continuous dearth of social peace and for the use of force rather than lawful and democratic methods in the resolution of conflicts. No less damaging to the spirit of national integration was the distillation of ethnic superiority designed to justify land expropriation and abusive exploitation.

All these negative consequences of the southern conquest were due less to the conquest itself (which, as we saw, saved Ethiopia from colonialism and dismemberment) than to the manner it was used to bribe and corrupt the nobility for the purpose of establishing autocracy. This criticism is already present in Gebre Hiwot's assessment when he notes that, instead of forcing the nobles to accept new things, Menelik flattered them and "turned them into courtiers."¹⁰¹ Haile Selassie was to aggravate the practice through the grants of land and privileges. However evident the role of

autocracy was in causing disunity and irresolution, nowhere do we find in Kebede's analysis the idea of blaming the use made of the southern expansion. Instead, he too comes out in favor of autocracy by exhorting the Ethiopians to unity and hard work so that Ethiopia may "reach the great destiny wished by its emperor"¹⁰² In other words, the people, especially the nobility, are responsible for the retardation of Ethiopia, against which the emperor is fighting so tirelessly.

Another Ethiopian intellectual whose attitude to the nobility was frankly antagonistic is Germachew Tekle Hawariat. In his novel, *Arya*, he submits a whole theory of modernization, mainly inspired by the French Revolution. Because of this French model, he is far from being a Japanizer. Nonetheless, his hostility to the nobility and his leaning towards Haile Selassie's autocracy make his position characteristic. Though the novel applauds Ethiopian culture and past history of independence, even admitting that the glorious past destined Ethiopia for a great future, the whole book is uncompromisingly set on demolishing this tradition. The destruction of tradition is perceived as the *sine qua non* condition for modernization. True, the new education "must agree with our good natural qualities and must promote rather than destroy them."¹⁰³ All the same, the defense of tradition is conservatism and, according to Germachew, conservatism

is of no use to progress Instead, what is imperative for backward countries like ours is to direct, if necessary by force, the people towards the new road and to throw away all past and obsolete habit once and for all.¹⁰⁴

The author is aware of the difficulty of the task, as people are attached to their tradition. But it must be done if modernization is desired.

Germachew's model is the French Revolution, which he admires for having brought to power the bourgeoisie at the expense of the aristocracy. Unlike the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie has the habit of saving, values work, is indifferent to descent, and supports science.¹⁰⁵ The aristocracy is so alien to these values that, without a complete political and social transformation, modernization cannot take root in Ethiopia. We hasten to add that Germachew, himself an important official in Haile Selassie's government, nowhere calls for a revolution in the French fashion. This kind of revolution is not necessary when enlightened and determined leaders are in charge of modernization. And according to Germachew, Ethiopia enjoys such a leader in Haile Selassie. Provided youngsters and educated

people fully support the modernizing effort of Haile Selassie, "the project started by Emperor Menelik" will be "completed by Haile Selassie."¹⁰⁶

This open support for Haile Selassie's autocracy is surprising: the hero of the novel had many occasions to see how little Haile Selassie's leadership was in line with modernization. For instance, there is the incident which compelled Araya, educated and eager to serve his country, to resign from his new governmental post because his superior will not let him work. The incident tells a great deal about the inefficient and corrupt practice of the entire administration. In several places, the hero is also critical of Haile Selassie's handling of the war. His refusal to resort to guerrilla warfare against the Italians is perceived as a major military mistake. His exile for Europe after the defeat is described in terms which are hardly laudatory.

Granted that Germachew is no "Japanizer," nevertheless he shares the general theoretical position of the first Ethiopian intellectuals, namely the negative assessment of the nobility and its corollary, the need for autocratic rule. His attitude towards the Ethiopian tradition weakens his case by displaying the organic unity between tradition and the ruling class. If the ruling class is displaced, then tradition becomes rootless. All this indicates the great distance separating the early intellectuals from the basic premises of the Japanese theoretical and ideological root of modernization.

Let there be no doubt about it: the Japanese intellectuals who worked to bring about modernization aimed first of all at modernizing the traditional elite. There was no call for its overthrow, no iconoclastic discourse on its major values and beliefs. Still less was there a demand for an autocratic government. Indeed, they advocated Westernization, but through a careful borrowing intent on avoiding the disruption of Japanese identity and ruling elite. Characteristically, most of these modernizing intellectuals kept close links with feudal lords whom they advised on the need to make reforms in order to save Japan. They did not hold the traditional elite in low esteem. Nor were they involved in selecting one traditional leader as modern while labelling all the others reactionary.

It will be useful to cite here some relevant Japanese intellectuals whose modernizing influence was significant. Thus, Sakuma Shozan was "a senior *samurai*, whose lord became a member of the Tokugawa Council," while he himself "was made adviser on coast defense."¹⁰⁷ Hotta Masayoshi was "head of the council at the time of Townsend Harris's negotiations."¹⁰⁸ Aizawa Seishisai was one of the "scholars serving the Tokugawa lord of Mito."¹⁰⁹ These intellectuals were writing and working for different feudal

lords, yet rather than attempting to overthrow these lords to pave the way for an autocratic ruler, they found a way to change influential leaders of the ruling elite without causing the rise of an autocrat.

The Japanese intellectuals had one theme only: the appropriation of Western technology for the defense of Japan. For them, modernization was not so much Westernization as the acquisition, in line with the tradition of the Samurai, of the means to save Japan. It was thus the continuation of a traditional obligation which, however, required far-reaching reforms owing to the change of context. The need to acquire Western military technology dictated a need for commensurate radical social and economic changes, for, in the words of Masayoshi, "military power always springs from national wealth," which is "principally to be found in trade and commerce."¹¹⁰ Unlike the Ethiopian ruling elite and intellectuals, who could afford to extract more surplus from the south, the Japanese elite had no other choice than to generate the much needed resources from inner social and economic transformations.

These reforms, however necessary, would not be allowed to subvert Japanese values and leadership; hence the constant need for cultural borrowings, conditional, of course, on greater affirmation of Japanese identity. Thus, for Shozan, Japan must learn from the West "not theories of government and ethics, but highly ingenious techniques and machinery . . . so that we might be prepared to ward off indignities from the West."¹¹¹ Seishisai is even more specific: criticizing some of his compatriots for their "weakness . . . for novel gadgets and rare medicines," he reminds them that "defense did not depend solely on weapons and technology. It also involved leadership and morale. Morale, in turn, rested on the preservation of traditional attitudes and values."¹¹² The same idea is defended by Fukuzawa Yukichi. While admiring Western rights, liberty, philosophy, and above all Western science, economics, and industry, he warns that these "ought not to be adopted simply because they were Western; they ought to be adopted only if they contribute to Japan's welfare."¹¹³ He expressed the spirit of borrowing as follows:

We want our learning independent, not licking up the lees and scum of the westerners. We want our commerce independent, not dominated by them. We want our law independent, not held in contempt by them. We want our religion independent, not trampled underfoot by them.¹¹⁴

Nowhere is any such defense of tradition to be found in the writings of the so-called Ethiopian "Japanizers." The passionate concern of the Japanese intellectuals for the preservation of Japan's culture and elite had a significant impact on the process of modernization in Japan. For instance, it brought about "the Education Rescript of 1890" which "gave priority to Confucian precepts as the basis for moral teaching in schools."¹¹⁵ In this way, Japan could borrow Western science and technology while emphasizing its own values and traditional system. The negative effects of borrowing, that is the danger of alienation and the subsequent conflict of loyalty, were thus avoided.

As we saw, none of the Ethiopian intellectuals has undertaken the task of defending and renovating Ethiopian traditional values and social system. Gebre Hiwot saw the need but did not get down to work. As a result, modernization became Westernization, that is, a process whereby the borrowing of Western technology and rationality meant the progressive dissolution of Ethiopian mentality. Modernization was conceptualized in terms of conflict between tradition and modernity, not in terms of modernity going in for the revival and enhancement of tradition. Only the latter is the Japanese way so that the qualification of the first intellectuals as Japanizers is anything but acceptable.

One may argue that, imperial guidance being crucial in the process of Japan's modernization, the Ethiopian intellectuals were not wrong in supporting an emperor who had modernizing leanings, however minor. Their failure, then, would be due less to their own actions than to the inability of Haile Selassie to come up to expectations. The objection, however, does no more than mask the major misunderstanding and intellectual error of the "Japanizers." For, however central and revered imperial guidance may have been in the process of Japanese modernization, it had no congruence with autocratic rule. Above all, it is essential to know that "the emperor had long been the theoretical source of authority in Japan" and that "in the Meiji period . . . as often in the past, his role was to bestow legitimacy on those who had seized power by force."¹¹⁶ In thus taking little personal part in government, the probability that he could concurrently hold executive, legislative, and judicial powers was very unlikely. Thus, the revival and modernization of the Japanese imperial tradition signified the strengthening of the mythical and legitimizing role of the emperor, not the concentration of all powers in his hands.

The difference between the Meiji constitution and that of Haile Selassie proceeds from the mythical role assumed by the Japanese emperorship in direct contrast to Haile Selassie, who, in addition to being the only source of power, was also the sole executive of all power. The Japanese constitution enabled the modernizing elite to apply radical reforms under the aegis of the revered emperor; the elite, in other words, assumed and exercised real power. Not so the constitution of Haile Selassie, committed as it was to promoting the emperor as the only actor in the process of Ethiopian modernization. The emperor was not to lend his authority and protection to a modernizing elite; rather, he was to assume absolute power in the name of modernization. He was not the patron of modernization, but its personal executioner and profiteer. That, in this condition, he also ended up by being its principal obstructor should not come as a surprise.

To my knowledge, the only Ethiopian writer whose thinking on these matters approximated that of Japan is Mekonen Endalkachew. A leading member of the aristocratic class and an important official of Haile Selassie's regime, Mekonen is more often than not considered a conservative author. None of his books indulge in the customary criticism of the traditional elite and the clergy, nor of Ethiopian values in general. Instead, he is keen to criticize modern ideas, as for instance in his short novel, *Ye Dehoch Ketema* [*The City of the Poor*]. The novel relates the misfortunes of a wealthy man: possessed by an excessive lust for money, the man came to forget even the most elementary duties. He had no family, no friends, no country to which he was attached ultimately; he was to die alone in dreadful circumstances.

Yet, the interpretation of the novel as signifying an assault on bourgeois and modern values would be utterly wrong. As specified by the author himself, the novel "does not say that it is wrong to become rich by one's effort. It simply reminds that wealth is granted to individuals so that they may do a lot of things."¹¹⁷ The neglect of patriotic, religious, and family duties for the sake of amassing wealth is then what the novel condemns. And as Mekonen has certainly observed the spread of this unhealthy attitude, he alerts his contemporaries to the disastrous effects of Western values whenever they fail to serve traditional commitments.

Quite logically, Mekonen devised a theory of Ethiopian modernization based on the leadership of the traditional aristocracy. For this leadership to be feasible, one condition must be met: the revival and modernization of the traditional Ethiopian clientship. The traditional order, we know, pro-

moted the mutual interests of leaders and followers. Wealth had one essential function: to multiply the number of followers and dependents in return for political and military support. Mekonen's novel, *Ye Dem Dimtse*, reminds us of the nature of the relationship through a spokesman no less authoritative than Abuna Petros, the Head of the Ethiopian Church:

Very well, my children: listen to me and I'll tell you. The first kings and princes and chiefs who with their blood laid the foundations of Ethiopia's liberty, valued men more than property. Property was nothing to them—their property was in men. Therefore their estates, including their private property, represented sustenance for your fathers and fore-fathers. The property of these masters being the property of the people, any soldier or servant could call the master's house his own house. Then when the master died, he would bequeath his land and property, as to a son, to his followers and servants who had rendered service to Ethiopia . . . Through a unity of this sort between governor and people, the freedom of Ethiopia was protected and lasted long.¹¹⁸

Mekonen discerns everywhere the loss of this tradition, caused both by the erosive effects of Western ideas of individualism and personal property and by the centralization and appropriation of power by the modern state. Traditional lords are more and more behaving as merchants, amassing wealth for their personal pleasure and consumption, forgetful of their traditional duties. Followers no longer share the wealth of their master; they are simply used and dismissed without further ado. But there is more. State centralization has appropriated all authority and power. The marginalization of the nobility has entailed the loss of leadership, dedication, and mutual concern enshrined in the traditional vertical relations. Modernization brought a drastic and irreparable deterioration of the power of the nobility in favor of the central government. For Mekonen, the net result of this decay is the inability of Ethiopia to defend itself, as evinced by the Italian occupation. The breakdown of the traditional political system and values is largely responsible for the defeat. A novel with a revealing title, *Almoṭṭum Biye Alwachm* (*Do Not Say I Am Not Dead*), tells it in no uncertain terms: "Victory does not depend on weapon but only on religion and morale."¹¹⁹ It adds: "Do you know that once a nation has been stripped of its freedom and morale, it will prefer dying to killing?"¹²⁰

Salvation can only come from the revival of the traditional system. Accordingly, Mekonen proposes a "system of benign feudalism"¹²¹ which draws "the picture of a social system in which the benevolent and enlightened aristocracy use their wealth and power for the benefit of the common people."¹²² No doubt, Mekonen considers his proposal as a modernization of the traditional religiosity. Indeed, for the benevolent aristocracy to come into being, the pursuit of wealth must be tempered by otherworldliness. Only then can greed be vanquished and the search for profit transformed into generosity and social welfare. The revival of the traditional religious zeal is, therefore, an essential condition for social peace and prosperity. According to *Salsawi Dawit* [*King David the Third*], the conditions for good government are as follows: first, "to have no praise and attraction for this vain world"; second, "to have no interests with persons that one rules"; and third, "to avoid association with persons who obstruct truth and justice."¹²³ Of all these conditions, otherworldliness is the basic one, since government can soar above personal and partisan interests only if the rulers turn a deaf ear to the attractions of the sensuous world.

Truly, then, Mekonen is nearer to the Japanese model than are the so-called Japanizers themselves. He is so by his passion to save the traditional elite and beliefs, his refusal to equate modernization with the fall of tradition, and his opposition to centralism and autocracy. Even if his proposals do not match up to the radical reforms of Japan, the fact that, contrary to prevailing ideas, he was not in favor of autocracy, preferring to support the aristocracy, is already a great achievement. Had his ideas been shared by others, especially by the rising educated elite, a social force, paving the way for a concrete program of change, would have been born. Unfortunately, Mekonen was all alone; worse, he was constantly accused of being a harsh conservative and defender of past privileges. Moreover, some such social thinking would have been vigorously fought by Haile Selassie, who could hardly be expected to tolerate a political thinking so opposed to his autocratic ambition. What is said here is not a mere speculation; it actually happened in various circumstances, nothing being more memorable than Haile Selassie's determination to crush defiant nobles.

A more serious objection would point out the utopian nature of Mekonen's project. Knowing the reactionary attitude of the nobility, is the project of changing it into a generous modernizing force not tantamount to asking the impossible? What can be expected from nobles who, in the words of Afework, simply "eat, drink, sleep and grow fat like Easter sheep

at the expense of the poor public which is continually and pitilessly robbed by them?"¹²⁴ Absolutely convinced that "as long as the feudal system exists in the empire of Ethiopia, neither education nor liberty will reign there,"¹²⁵ Afework saw no other alternative to that of bringing about the ultimate destruction of the class than to ally himself with the Italian invaders.

But consider the awkward implications resulting from the acceptance of the objection. First, we no longer need to speak of Japanizers and the Japanese model, still less of the Ethiopian potential to follow that model. Second, in view of the non-existence of a democratic alternative, the course followed by Haile Selassie sets itself up as the only way out. In thus transforming a political choice into necessity, we will be repeating the mistake of the first intellectuals. Third, we are but rejecting other possibilities before they were even tried. And my contention is that they were deliberately blocked, prevented from being put to the test. If the aristocracy ate and grew fat, this was the outcome of a policy of expansion as well as of a deliberate marginalization. The story of the nobility becoming like Easter sheep is the final triumph of imperial absolutism. Mekonen was against this decline, for in so treating the nobility Ethiopia was actually losing its values and commitments—in a word, its soul, its survival power.

Neither the notion of generous aristocracy, nor the transformation of its warlike values into business drives was really utopian. What is most admired in Japan is the willingness of an important section of the nobility to relinquish its feudal rights. Because of this, the class assumed the obligation of preserving its leadership and status through production achievements. Who could bet on the total absence of such a feeling within the Ethiopian nobility? Can we not cite a case of a leading noble who willingly deprived himself of many privileges? I have in mind *Ras Imru Haile Selassie*, nicknamed "the red *ras*."¹²⁶ A great patriot, *Ras Imru* became "a living legend . . . because he has distributed so much of his land and wealth to his needy country men."¹²⁷ There is also the case of the harsh rival of Haile Selassie, *Ras Hailu of Gojjam*. He was so enthusiastic about modern technology and the development of arts and crafts in Ethiopia that Mockler does not hesitate to say that "he was Ethiopia's equivalent of a Renaissance Prince."¹²⁸ His collaboration with the Italians, essentially motivated by his rivalry with Haile Selassie, need not blind us to the fact that he was a traditionalist leader who succeeded in fostering business leanings.

One may be tempted to judge these cases isolated and insignificant. Yet who knows what would have happened if the eccentricity of Ras Imru had been supported by Haile Selassie and given intense propaganda and ideological backing? Had such an initiative been backed by the full weight of Haile Selassie and wrapped in a theoretical and ideological frame by the intellectuals, an individual eccentricity would have probably become a norm. Changes in history are often due to small deviant groups progressively influencing larger groups.

The preconceived ideological hostility of the intellectuals to the nobility did not allow this kind of evolution. The pre-war intellectuals thought that by aiding Haile Selassie's rise to power, they could at least count on a monarch sympathetic to modernity. Haile Selassie utilized his political naivety with admirable skill. He indeed decapitated the nobility, but with the aim of establishing his own autocratic rule. In the end, the position of the intellectuals became extremely precarious. The more they were hailing their champion in the newspapers *Berhanena Selam* (*Light and Peace*) and *Aimro* (*Reason*), the greater became their dependence on him. For, "independent of him, the progressives were mostly isolated, rejected, and impotent, and their number was insignificant."¹²⁹ The foreseeable happened: once Haile Selassie had consolidated his power, "his need for the intellectuals diminished"¹³⁰ and the exciting atmosphere of free discussion came to an abrupt end.

The radical goal of the intellectuals and students of the 1960s and 70s was to encounter a fate similar to that of the pre-war intellectual movement. The view according to which there is "a sharp difference between the intellectual revolutionaries of the seventies and Gäbrä Heywät and his generation"¹³¹ does not go far enough. Apart from a noticeable radicalization, the problems of Ethiopia are analyzed in the same way; even the proposed solutions match. Like the first intellectuals, the revolutionaries of the seventies regarded Ethiopia as a society which must be destroyed and built anew. As nothing was to be salvaged, change could not rely on existing social forces. The ruling elites, even the petty bourgeoisie, were all labelled as reactionary classes. Inevitably, the need to create a new society gave rise to an autocratic rule which, however different from the imperial autocracy, worked nevertheless with the same implacable logic. The revolutionaries became the hostages of the new regime, and were again dismissed after having been used. The pre-war intellectuals wanted to wipe out the nobility, the intellectuals of the 70s Haile Selassie

and his regime. Thus both overlooked the same problem: the force replacing the ousted ruling class. Change being conceptualized in terms of catapulting a new reality into existence rather than saving the existing order, both were—despite confidence in their ability to control the new reality—equally heedless of the vengeful and destructive forces that they were unleashing.

This remark leads us to inquire into the nature of Ethiopian evolution after the overthrow of the monarchy. In the name of modernization and progress, the Ethiopian society was turned upside down. Seeing the resounding failure of the upheaval, one really wonders whether Ethiopia has any potential left for modernization, whether it can ever be a viable society. A serious assessment is imperative if for no other reason than to know in which direction, if any, solutions should be sought.

Chapter Six

PROBLEMS OF MODERNIZATION

The preceding chapters determined the survival of Ethiopia, testified to by the protracted duration of the country. The last of those chapters detected substantial wear and tear in the social fabric, as Ethiopia plunged increasingly into the turmoil of modernization. The worst strain was doubtless the overthrow of Haile Selassie's regime by the revolution of 1974. The destruction of the monarchy, one of the pillars of Ethiopian unity, unprecedented as it was, expressed a deeply-felt malaise. To unravel the true nature of this general malaise, it is essential to delve into the reasons which brought about the strong antagonism between the society at large and the imperial power.

ABOUT HAILE SELASSIE'S REGIME AND ITS DOWNFALL

Studies of Ethiopia written after 1974 try, with varying degrees of success, to analyze the causes of the overthrow of Haile Selassie. Some studies, prior to 1974, were also provident enough to herald, if not the downfall of the regime, at least the gathering of insuperable difficulties. We shall review some of these theories, mainly for the purpose of knowing whether or not deviations from traditional practices caused the accumulation of discontents. But we must first resolve a theoretical difficulty pertaining to the nature of Haile Selassie's regime. We have (so far) taken the term autocracy for granted and made little attempt to justify its pertinence. But why is "autocracy" preferable to other qualifications used by scholars to define this particular regime?

Referring to the regime, Patrick Gilkes spoke of "feudalism and modernization." Keeping in mind that previous chapters have contested the use of the notion of feudalism, we can still ask whether the concept is

appropriate to the society of Haile Selassie. One reason for doing so is that important feudal characteristics, absent from the traditional system, surfaced during Haile Selassie's reign. Thus, private ownership of land and rigid social stratification emerged. Large estates, held privately by powerful individuals and attended by the proliferation of tenancy, became common. The class division of the society assumed a rigidity reminiscent of European feudalism. The principle of heredity started to govern the society, in the forms of hereditary positions of power and hereditary monarchy.

Even so, can Haile Selassie's regime be termed feudal without serious conceptual distortions? Already the context of modernization in which the reign was immersed strongly advises against using the concept of feudalism. Modernization, one may argue, was only a veneer; the underlying reality was but feudal. Yes, but the seeming nature of modernization does not hinder the regime from developing particular traits opposing it to feudalism. One aspect on which all scholars agree is the tight centralization of the government, with the subsequent decline of the nobility and regional power. As we saw, so accurately does centralization define the regime that the story of modernization can be summarized by the progressive supremacy of the central power over all other forms of power. While luring the nobility with the bright prospects of hereditary position and private landholding, Haile Selassie made sure of the surrender of its political and military powers. The apparent economic consolidation of the nobility was actually accompanied by its political eclipse. As Hess pointed out, "on this level feudalism has died in Ethiopia and has been replaced by a national monarchy."¹ Though the concept of national monarchy is itself little illuminating, it does intimate the inanity of the concept of feudalism in the context of radical centralization of power. Parcellization of sovereignty, be it recalled, is a basic characteristic of feudalism.

As one would expect, many scholars, leaning on centralism, will define Haile Selassie's regime by the notion of absolutism. Thus, Markakis pleads for "the absolutist state"² resulting from "a drive for centralisation that was to elevate the throne to the pinnacle of monarchical absolutism."³ For the same reasons, Bahru brandishes the notion of "Ethiopian absolutism."⁴ Indeed, what could be more tempting than to analyze the regime of Haile Selassie through the lens of the European transition from feudalism to capitalism? Are not some of the modernizing aspects of Haile Selassie's rule, such as the creation of a standing army, the establishment of a cen-

tralized administration and of a national market and taxation, similar to the events of European history at the dawn of modernity, just as the persistence of feudal features is common to both?

On closer look, however, the parallel with European history seems an overstatement, to say the least. Bahru notes an initial discrepancy: "From the womb of European absolutism was born capitalism. Ethiopia was scarcely capitalist even on the eve of 1974."⁵ This observation alone is enough to invalidate the notion of absolutism, if only because it indicates how alien the regime of Haile Selassie was to the thrust of European absolutism. Indeed, according to Anderson's study, "the Absolutist State," be it in the West or in the East, "served the political interests of the nobility,"⁶ for "the social power of the nobility was the central spring of its existence."⁷ Because of this, Anderson rejects the views making the absolutist state either into an arbitrator between the aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie or the blunt instrument of the latter. When the absolutist state took steps which conflicted with feudal rights, it was to serve the long-term interest of the aristocracy. The bourgeoisie has no doubt benefited from these steps, but the main target was the survival of the aristocratic rule and interests. As I see no other way to ensure this survival than through measures designed to modernize the aristocracy itself, there is practically no difference between the modernization of Europe and that of Japan. In the light of the fundamental logic of rescuing traditional ruling classes through modernizing steps, the differences noted by scholars between Europe and Japan appear as incidental and circumstantial.⁸

So defined, absolutism was not quite what Haile Selassie had in mind. He never toyed with the idea of modernizing the aristocracy in order to protect its interests. Having no salvational purpose, he could not even create the rudiments of capitalism. If measures were taken to protect the economic interest of the nobility, they were conditional on its political and social withdrawal. These steps were designed to bribe the nobility, not to modernize it. Members of the nobility had to become courtiers under pain of being replaced by individuals who owed their position and wealth only to Haile Selassie's personal protection.

In view of this consistent policy, autocracy best defines Haile Selassie's regime. Because modernization was for him nothing else but the use of modern means to assert his complete power over the nobility, his "absolutism" signified personal supremacy more than the hegemony of a class. He defended the privileged class only insofar as it backed his personal power.

Consequently, the spirit of Haile Selassie's modernization is properly understood only against the background of the *traditional* system of power struggle. Lefort has perfectly analyzed it:

Haile Selassie remained completely faithful to the eternal ambition of Ethiopian Emperors: to establish the superiority of imperial power over the great provincial dynasties, to enshrine the primacy of central power over local powers and to cement the unity of the Empire around the Throne. But he went further than any of his predecessors to borrow from abroad modern instruments, methods and institutions and introduce its capital and its technology to achieve this end. Put differently, if the end was in keeping with the imperial tradition and remained endogenous, the means became modern and exogenous.⁹

Because modern means were used for a purpose which was not modern, they were unable to inaugurate any sustained and consistent process of modernization. This interpretation is further substantiated by consideration of the personality of Haile Selassie. As Bahru notes, nothing "pre-occupied him as much as the acquisition and preservation of political power; it was a matter of obsessive concern for him, and the one constant element in his long political life."¹⁰ Given such a personality, he was the first to understand how well modern means and institutions could serve his passion for power. And all that he did or suffered cannot be grasped apart from this permanent drive to use circumstances, foreign institutions, and any means to strengthen his personal power and glory.

The understanding of Haile Selassie's main drive is important to analyze the causes of his downfall. Only in the light of his passion for power can the contradictions and shortcomings of his reign be understood. The failure of Ethiopian modernization cannot be conceptualized unless modernization is excluded from the real target of the regime. Failure was not caused by structural obstacles or by the application of a bad policy; it was the outcome of the contradiction implied in the use of modern methods to achieve a non-modern goal.

Besides, this kind of situation was not peculiar to Ethiopia. The adoption of modernization as a means to take more power from society for the exclusive benefit of central authority was common in many Third World countries. Particularly, it was adopted by Muslim countries, the most prominent being the cases of Sultan Selim of Turkey and Muhammad Ali, Pa-

sha of Egypt. Under the guise of modernization, both established centralized systems, essentially geared to the pursuit of personal political and military glory. As summarized by one scholar,

Muslim leaders embarked on policies similar in some way or another to Muhammad Ali's which, whatever their ostensible aim, ended up by increasing enormously the power of the rulers over the ruled, widening the gap between them, and generating powerful tensions and strains in society.¹¹

All this goes to show that traditional powers, insofar as they did not undergo inner changes, were naturally inclined to consider modern means more as instruments to strengthen their control than to initiate social changes. This thinking could not help but flare up in Ethiopia owing to its imperial tradition and built-in power struggle.

In their assessment of the causes of Haile Selassie's downfall, scholars insist on their national character. They portray a global, national crisis, involving economic, social, and political plight. The circumstances of Haile Selassie's fall, that is the famine in Wollo, student demonstrations, rebellions in army camps, etc., highly symptomatic though they may have been, need not concern us here. Instead, let us concentrate on structural causes. However, mention should be made of one point which may be termed circumstantial while being a characteristic product of the regime. Indeed, among the causes, some analysts pick out the fact that Haile Selassie "had become too old and senile to employ even his old skills effectively."¹² Understandably, a younger Haile Selassie would have overcome the difficulties and reasserted his authority. This explanation must not be discarded: Haile Selassie's senility is a deep expression of the regime. How intense must have been his passion for power for him to cling to the throne until he became senile, thus thwarting the chance of the crown prince, even though he had fought so hard to introduce the notion of hereditary monarchy in the constitution? In other words, the regime was so autocratic that nobody outside Haile Selassie could take the slightest initiative to counter the rising popular threat. All his entourage had long ago lost the very notion of initiative, composed as it was of passive and obedient persons who were unable to make decisions by themselves, so that, once Haile Selassie was incapacitated, the regime was powerless to defend itself. Such a general passivity raises senility to the level of an important cause.

Be it noted, however, that "it came as a complete surprise when he [Haile Selassie] was deposed by the Dergue."¹³ This statement contradicts the previous assessment: after all, the social protest was neither general nor organized. Being an urban phenomenon mostly confined to Addis Ababa, it involved students, some military garrisons, elements from the bureaucracy, some sectors of the petty bourgeoisie. Most of all, the whole countryside remained aloof. There was nothing in the protest that a determined regime could not have tackled. That the overthrow came as a surprise, insofar as it contradicted the thesis of the general crisis, is quite revealing. What degree of paralysis had the regime reached for a small sector of the society to overthrow so venerable an institution as the Ethiopian monarchy? This again highlights the role played by senility and the deep lethargy of the regime.

One may object that Haile Selassie's senility was only incidental, for in any case the regime was structurally condemned. If the uprising of 1974 were stifled, another one would have burst out soon after. I do not disagree with this argument. Still, the incidental turned out to be structural, given the general surprise, even of the groups fighting the government. The surprise is a continual questioning: how did it happen that no social force came out in support of the regime? It was demolished practically without violence. The understanding of this easy fall cannot help considering that

there was no traditional countryside waiting to be mobilised on behalf of the imperial regime, because that regime had cut itself off from the countryside even more effectively than it had done from the towns.¹⁴

And what was the cause of its isolation? Without a doubt, centralization, which "had reduced the capacity of the regional nobility to act as intermediaries between central government and the countryside."¹⁵

This isolation of Haile Selassie from his traditional power base, namely the nobility and the countryside, confirms, if need be, that the regime was no absolutism in defense of the traditional elite. It was a personal power based on a modern apparatus, especially on the bureaucracy and standing army, but with no effective backing of any social class. Centralization had rendered powerless the only class which could have given effective support. Moreover, as Haile Selassie was extremely reluctant to modernize the nobility, neither did he try to find a substitute through forms of popular support. Yet, notes Lefort, "a modern autocracy is only viable if it is

based on a party and mass organizations."¹⁶ Haile Selassie relied essentially on the state apparatus, on the loyalty of the institutions (army, bureaucracy) he created. This was a basic weakness of the regime, in view of the inability of state institutions to substitute for class or popular base. The people involved in the state apparatus belong by their economic interests, beliefs, and ethnic affiliations to other social groups to which they extend their primary loyalty. And the more the state tries to soar above classes, the more insecure the life of civil servants becomes. The lack of reforms, or even any sudden economic crisis, is likely to hurt first the salaried civil servants, including the military.

Among other things, the social and political consequences of autocracy—that is, the resulting crisis of leadership—must be given due consideration in the collapse of the regime. The decline of class support caused by the solitary exercise of power has the major effect of undermining and incapacitating ruling elites. A regime reaching this degree of self-destruction is, of course, unable to defend itself. By subverting the nobility in the name of modernization and centralization, Haile Selassie was actually digging his own grave and that of the monarchy. The destinies of the monarchy and the nobility being inseparable, there was no way in which the former could survive by wrecking the latter.

According to Clapham, the imperial government collapsed, "not because it was badly managed, but because it was by nature incapable of handling the increasing demands which were placed on it."¹⁷ Even though the difference between bad management and the incapacity to handle crises is not exactly clear, Clapham explains that the incapacity is due to the establishment of a "household system of government,"¹⁸ which was perhaps appropriate for court politics, but could not tackle social movements. But is this household system of government something other than the practice of autocracy? It does presuppose a system of government entirely devoid of devolution of power and in which completely submissive people execute the orders of one despot. Its very inability to handle social movements is an expression of its isolation, and hence of its loss of leadership. For reasons which will become clear as we proceed, of all the causes enumerated by scholars, none is more basic than the crisis of leadership.

For the time being, let us examine those reasons considered most decisive by many scholars. Economic crisis is widely held to have been one determining factor. The regime's refusal to effect reforms, especially those pertaining to land, had blocked economic growth, plunging the society

into a chronic crisis. In Marxist language, the relations of production derived from property relations became a fetter to the growth of the productive forces, thus generating a revolutionary situation. However, recent studies have tended to downplay the economic factor in favor of the national question, believed to be the major problem of Ethiopia. Unsurprisingly, this view is defended by the supporters of the colonial thesis, discussed in the first chapter of this book. How do colonialism and colonial policy explain the collapse of Haile Selassie's regime?

The thesis does not deny the part played by economic crisis in the overthrow of the imperial system. It simply considers the crisis as a consequence rather than a cause. The cause was colonialism and the colonial policy of Haile Selassie. Especially, the rejection of land reform was but a manifestation of the colonial policy to which the regime was wholly committed. Moreover, the whole social fabric being torn by ethnic tensions, there was no way by which Ethiopia could embark on a determined course of development. Neither the colonial intention of the regime nor the resistance—now open, now veiled—of the colonized peoples could allow the implementation of progressive policies.

The most visible manifestation of this ethnic resistance was the armed uprisings in Eritrea, Ogaden, and Bale. These conflicts drained resources which might have otherwise been used for development; they were also the direct cause for the sedition in the garrisons, whose role in the overthrow of Haile Selassie is only too evident. Since colonial policy and the need to subjugate by force the colonized peoples prevented Ethiopia from adopting a progressive course of social development, all the other causes enumerated by scholars (urban discontents and their impact, economic crisis, famine) are but symptoms of the one and only cause: the national question in Ethiopia.

Impressive though the generalizing and simplifying capacity of the thesis may be, it does not accord with known facts. Most importantly, it keeps silent on the question of whether ethno-nationalism is a cause or a consequence of the failure of modernization. About the validity of the colonial thesis, as much had been said in the first chapter, there is no need to raise the issue again. We shall simply note that the forces which were active in the overthrow of Haile Selassie being essentially urban, the low participation of the rural population hardly supports the assumption that ethnicity was the principal cause of the revolution. This does not mean that the question of land reform was not central. It was, as witnessed by the consis-

tent and unifying slogan of the student movement: "land to the tiller." This battle-cry was no doubt intended to bring to an end the discrepancy between the landholding systems of the south and the north. Precisely, the hook lies here: the so-called colonizers or their offspring came out against the discrepancy and, what is more, many fought and died for this cause. No significant force from the south, we repeat, either fought or supported the "colonial" state; not even the so-called settlers in the south were willing to defend it.

If anything, this proves that few people had their interests tied up with the preservation of the imperial state. Especially those scholars who speak of general crisis should admit that the regime had become so indiscriminately oppressive that it provoked a national resistance, cutting across ethnic distinctions. For this much is clear: the easy fall of Haile Selassie cannot be explained by reference to ethnic questions. Even the alleged Shewan base of the regime did not go to its rescue. Had it done so, a bloody course, with unpredictable outcome, would have been inevitable. In the national opposition, class solidarity and alliances were discernable, less so ethnic issues and ethno-national sentiments. But what about those groups who were openly struggling for self-determination, as in Eritrea or Ogaden? For them the ethnic issue had precedence over class solidarity and interests. But then, the birthplace of the national question in Ethiopia is not the south but Eritrea. If the allegation of forced incorporation of Eritrea into Ethiopia is put aside, Eritrean nationalism becomes an outcome, a product rather than an initial standpoint. And we must drop the idea of forced annexation. The first chapter had already underlined the noticeable role played by Eritrean intellectuals and freedom fighters in the defense of the integrity of Ethiopia. This Eritrean sense of being member of Ethiopian nationhood found its popular expression in the unionist party, which "enjoined solid support in the Christian highlands"¹⁹ as well as among "many Muslim chiefs and traditional notables."²⁰ Even a greater reservation of the Muslim communities would not prove the point, given the fact that it was not yet inspired by Eritrean nationalism. All things considered, the reality was a strong popular force in favor of the union with Ethiopia.

This clears the way for an understanding of Eritrean nationalism as an outcome of wrong policy rather than as a suppressed initial demand. Because they suffered greater exclusion, entailing immediate economic and social handicaps, Muslim communities were the first to show discontent.

They were soon after followed by a growing number of Christians, increasingly marginalized by Haile Selassie's tight centralizing policy. This centralization, made effective by the dismantling of the federal status as a result of which Eritrea became a province, was materialized in the imposition of the Amharic language, the abolition of civil rights, and the transfer of local powers to state appointees. This "loss of control of regional affairs to the central government in Addis Ababa," with its subsequent economic and social disabilities, explains "the gradual rallying of the Christians to the nationalist cause."²¹

It is therefore wrong to reason in terms of the prior existence of an Eritrean nationalism which, suppressed for a while by Haile Selassie, flared up again in the form of armed resistance. On the contrary, Eritrean nationalism was progressively constructed as a protest against the exclusion and stagnation imposed by Haile Selassie's autocracy. This approach provides a historical view of its genesis and meaning. As rightly stated by Erlich,

the province was reannexed not because Addis Ababa had the power to force it, but essentially because the strong elements in Eritrean society of the time wanted it. They did so mainly because they wanted to participate, spiritually and materially, not in the life of a provincial Eritrea but in the life of a great Ethiopia, which promised them better possibilities in various fields.²²

When these expectations were denied, Eritrean nationalism began to grow. Further ill-advised policy of greater centralization was to broaden considerably the basis of this "dissident nationalism"²³ during the rule of the Derg.

It is worth knowing why the same evolution did not take place elsewhere in Ethiopia, more exactly why it was slow to come, even though the same policy of power appropriation had been applied. Precisely, this time-lag indicates the extent to which ethno-nationalist movements in Ethiopia, be they Somali, Tigrean, Oromo, or Afar, are all products of the evolution of Eritrea. The increasingly nationalist turn taken by Eritrean protest, coupled with its military success, became a model to other oppositions. Had protest in Eritrea assumed a different form, ethnic movements in Ethiopia would have taken a novel course. Above all, the military success of Eritrean resistance convinced the other movements of the need to adopt ethno-nationalist language and a separatist goal to achieve success. Other

forms of struggle were either relegated to a position of secondary importance or frankly nullified.

The question is then: Why did protest in Eritrea assume a secessionist turn? Of course, the answer lies in the colonial legacy of Eritrea. The constant reference to this legacy provided the legal and ideological justifications for Eritrea's struggle for independence. The picture of the prior existence of an Eritrean state—before the incorporation into imperial Ethiopia—soon crystallized discontent, giving it a growing separatist tone. The more the struggle was identified with the bequeathed colonial state, the more independence appeared as a logical and legitimate outcome. This enabled the generation of myths, feeding on the nationalist sentiment. Thus, the belief that the Ethiopian rule had caused the economic stagnation of Eritrea was one of the most persistent myths. Though the pretension that independent Eritrea would have been economically and socially more successful than other Third Worlds countries was little justified, nevertheless, the strong belief was created that the future of Eritrea would have been much better without Ethiopia. No less important was the myth of the forced annexation of Eritrea in buttressing the colonial thesis. No matter that the main ingredients of colonial occupation were absent; the myth was necessary to paint a nation emerging from a bitter anti-colonial struggle. Only thus could the unity of an otherwise fragmented and divided society be invented. In effect, the theory of Ethiopian colonialism downplayed the religious split and the ethnic diversity of Eritrea.

In harnessing the various ethno-nationalist movements in Ethiopia to their real source—namely the Eritrean secessionist struggle—we proceed with a historical understanding, which is obviously the only viable approach. All those studies which do not refer ethnic movements in Ethiopia during and especially after Haile Selassie to the course imparted by Eritrean struggle and secession, which therefore speak of preexisting nationalist ideologies, are bogus on account of being unhistorical. The truth of this statement appears with greater clarity if we place the problem in the context of Africa. In all African countries, decolonization was accompanied by ethnic conflicts. Even the Eritrean type of secessionist evolution was attempted in such countries as Zaire and Nigeria. Circumstances, the international situation, and the internal balance of power did not allow these secessionist movements to reach their target. What makes Ethiopia different and its ethnic problems more acute is the success of the secessionist option of Eritrea. However, the model of Eritrea is bound to influence

other African trends. Thus, whether the secessionist option—i.e., the dismemberment of the state inherited from colonialism—should be the answer to African failure to modernize is henceforth a question to be put to all African countries.

Just as not long ago socialism and class struggle were presented as a solution to underdevelopment, ethno-nationalism is now the fashionable theory. The evolution from the one to the other has been easy because in both the same popular slogans and the same call for self-determination and democracy are found. We can even say that ethno-nationalism is a logical outcome of socialist ideology. Now is the time to deal with the second and probably the most important cause of ethnic problems in Ethiopia, namely the socialist ideology. This will further strengthen the historical origin of ethno-nationalism in Ethiopia.

Since Lenin, the principle of self-determination has been firmly rooted in the socialist programme. Contrived to fight against imperialism, it has been propagated as an inviolable principle. Whether or not Lenin and his successors have been faithful to the principle need not detain us here. All the same, the proliferation of nationalist movements in what was called the Soviet empire certifies the extent to which a thinking dominated by socialist ideology panders to ethno-nationalist appeals. Let us venture the following postulate: the more a country (or, to be precise, its intelligentsia) has been impregnated with socialist ideology, the stronger becomes its leaning towards ethno-nationalism. Such has been the case with Ethiopia: the dominance of socialist ideology in the Ethiopian student movement, the socialist programme of Eritrean and other dissident movements, the experience of socialism during the rule of the Derg, have all contributed to implanting ethno-nationalist sentiments.

How comes it, then, that the universalism of socialism and its insistence on class solidarity did not uproot ethnicity, not to mention the Marxist reduction of nationalism to an ideological weapon serving the interest of exploiting classes? Precisely, the weakening of class structure and class consciousness by the egalitarian ideology of socialism is responsible for the persistence or resurgence of ethnicity. After all, ethnicity is a form of communal thinking. Moreover, the association of nationalism with exploiting classes makes it questionable in the eyes of those who are excluded. Such a disparaging discourse gathers the ingredients of ethno-nationalism, since exclusion invents "nationalism," unfortunately, no more as an aspiration to

integrate into a wider community, but as a relapse into the natural purveyor of solidarity, that is, the primary community, the ethnic group.

How right a scholar like David Brown is when, explaining the attraction of ethnicity, he remarks that

the ethnic group is perceived by its members as a pseudo-kinship group, which promises to provide the all-embracing emotional security offered by the family to the child; which offers practical support, in the form of nepotism, such as the family gives to its members when they interact with others; and which, precisely because it is based on the ubiquitous family and kinship ties, is widely and easily available for utilization in politics.²⁴

I add that this desire to return to a state corresponding to the childhood of the group, which can be called cultural infantilism, becomes strongly seductive when it is awakened and later deceived by the communal promises of socialism.

This evolution took place in Ethiopia. Appeals for class solidarity were progressively changed into ethnic sirens, as underdevelopment aggravated exclusion and stagnation. The national and class solidarities, which at one point stood up to Haile Selassie, were fractured under the effect of the failures of socialism. As a result, various forms of dissident nationalism appeared here and there, all the more easily in that they seemed to be even more consistent with the promises of socialism.

My contention is the following: had the overthrow of Haile Selassie taken the form of class rule and interest instead of being based on popular demands, ethno-nationalism would not have progressed. The class solidarity between ruling as well as aspiring elites from the north and the south would have prevailed all over. The very measures designed to boost popular support for the Derg have removed the economic and political conditions on which this class unity could be based. The way was clear for ethno-nationalism, so that the so-called national question in Ethiopia is for the most part the product of the considerable loss of class consciousness caused by the socialist interlude. This conclusion, be it noted, agrees perfectly with the analyses of classical Marxism according to which nationalism is an ideology contrived to further the economic interests of ruling elites. Dissident nationalism crops up whenever solidaristic or integrative nationalism either fails or is hindered by historical circumstances.

There is no better way of corroborating this theory of ethno-nationalism than by the concrete study of the instances favoring its growth. We have already mentioned exclusion and loss of power; we must indicate clearly what causes them. To put it bluntly, ethnicity, ethno-nationalism, dissident nationalism—the name matters little—is invariably the product of failed modernization. We shall use the familiar term of underdevelopment to characterize this misfired modernization. The reference to modernization is important insofar as some modern elements—such as educated elites, urban sprawl, state centralization, dashed hopes—are necessary for the brewing of ethno-nationalism. Only when these products of modernization meet and mingle with inherited ethnic traits (language, religion, lineage ideology) can ethno-nationalism germinate.

A more dynamic conception of class consciousness is also necessary. According to the opportunities offered by the general trend of society, the evolution of class consciousness varies. Better opportunities tend to strengthen class solidarity to the detriment of ethnic ties, whereas underdevelopment slackens class consciousness for the benefit of ethnic solidarity. If, as stated by Markakis, the prime factor in the rise of ethno-nationalist movements is "exclusion from power and its perquisites,"²⁵ then the more restricted opportunities are, the lower the power of class consciousness becomes, and the louder is the call of ethnicity.

Accordingly, the understanding of the evolution of social movements in Ethiopia limps seriously unless its point of departure is Haile Selassie's autocracy. The Ethiopian evolution will not be intelligible if Haile Selassie's regime is credited with "progressive policies,"²⁶ as is sometimes held. As stated earlier, the "progressive" policies of Haile Selassie were meant not so much to modernize the country as to establish autocratic rule. It is centralization of power, rather than modernization, that defines his regime. Equally pointless is the attempt to distinguish, as does Bahru, a period of progress from a period of stagnation in Haile Selassie's long reign,²⁷ for the simple reason that the stagnation is a product of the wrong policies of the so-called progressive period.

We need to dwell on centralization, as it is the ultimate cause of all exclusions. The first victims were the traditional nobility and the pre-war intellectuals. If these groups could not be incorporated, how much more difficult then must it have been for the regime to integrate minority groups, Muslim communities, and protesters? While modernization certainly requires centralization, a regime with such narrow opportunities cannot be

called modernizing or even progressive in any sense of the word. The bureaucratic structure alone is not modernizing if a real devolution of power does not promote division of labor, mobility based on achievement, and a system of accountability.

Add onto the political need to assume autocratic power the cumulative effects of underdevelopment, and you will see exclusion in action as a form of government. The stagnation of economic growth, the increasing needs of modern life, both in terms of individual consumption and the running of the state machinery, population growth, the spread of modern education, etc., all tend to accentuate scarcity and competition. Consequently, exclusion and appropriation of power appear as the only way to control resources. Ethnicity, both as a policy of exclusion and as a reaction to exclusion, could not have found a better justification and function. The failure of development, and the extreme paucity of opportunities that ensues, blocks the progress of class solidarity cutting across ethnic boundaries. Unlike modernity, which competes for the creation of new resources, the competition of underdevelopment is for scarce resources. What else but exclusion and its corollary, ethno-nationalism, can arise from this economy of pillage? Ethno-nationalism being a resurgence of tradition, no wonder that in the face of modern adversities traditional forms of social solidarity reappear. Even if they are not adapted to the problems, they are nonetheless the most natural, the least exacting recourse.

Where a burgeoning modern economy pushes towards a nationalist ideology at the expense of ethnic ties, because vertical integration of elites is both a dynamic of growth and a way of establishing class control over society, a depressed economy encourages the fragmentation of ruling elites along ethnic lines. Hence, the tendency to attribute the rise of ethno-nationalism to ethnic diversity could not be more wrong-headed. The problem stems not from incompatibility between cultures, lineage ideologies, races, etc. The false consciousness of ethnicity projects as hostility between human beings what is in reality at best a struggle for power, at worst a need for protection. Because an underdeveloped economy can gratify so few people, it assumes the metaphysical form of insuperable racial, cultural, or lineage antagonism, especially in the eyes of threatened elites.

This is why studies of ethno-nationalist movements in Ethiopia always detect in them the ambition of urban elites or local gentries. Although revived in the name of suppressed cultures, yet ethno-nationalist movements are not essentially peasant movements or rebellions. Their leader-

ship as well as their ideology are derived from the urban elite. They express the demands of the elite, its striving for power, but in the guise of a traditionalist culture and peasant identity. Thus Markakis discovers that

the assertion of ethnicity through political ideas and methods is a function performed not by the tradition-bound peasantry, but by the modernized urban residents who find themselves competing for power, status, and wealth in a novel setting where these values are in short supply.²⁸

The urban leadership and rank-and-file of the Eritrean uprising are too well known to need further elaboration. The same can be said about the Tigrean revolt. The Oromo ethno-nationalist movements are essentially urban-based, both in terms of their leadership and their ideological textures. And if we look further back, behind the Tigrean uprising of 1943, known as Weyane, and the Bale revolts of 1963, we find the leadership and demands of local gentries dissatisfied with the loss of power caused by Haile Selassie's centralizing steps.²⁹

Many authors have observed that in Third-World countries class-based protests are scarce and short-lived, while student protests are loud and persistent. Doubtless, the higher level of political consciousness of students—compared with that of society at large—explains their protest. However, this explanation does not specify the deep reason for the early political awareness of students. Nor does it indicate why class-based protests are rare. Whereas their level of education should push them towards greater national integration, why do students specifically defend, more than the peoples they pretend to represent, narrow, ethnically based demands and slogans? The answer is not far off: education is where competition for power and status is most intense, as is the frustration resulting from exclusion. Modern education ignites ambition and multiplies frustration.

Admittedly, underdeveloped economies cannot absorb the educated people that they produce in relatively large number. And unlike the rest of the population, drop-outs, prompted as they are by ambition, can hardly resign to their fate. Among the causes which have radicalized the Ethiopian student movement during the reign of Haile Selassie, scholars cite small enrollments, inequality of educational opportunities among ethnic groups, growing number of drop-outs, and decreasing prospects of employment.³⁰ Inevitably, this state of intense competition and restricted opportunities lent itself to easy ethnic interpretation. More specifically, it

underwent a characteristic evolution leading it to ethno-nationalism. At first, the discontent expressed itself in terms of greater integration so as to remove the obstacles; it became nationalist and revolutionary. As the expected change failed to materialize, the frustration progressively was steered in the direction of ethno-nationalism, believed to be the radical solution. The evolution from the Ethiopian student movement to ethno-nationalist fragments is a living demonstration of the why and how of ethno-nationalism.

It must not be made to seem that ethnicity is a one-sided phenomenon, that it is the prerogative of those who are excluded. To the ethnicity of the excluded is opposed the ethnicity of those who exclude, that is, of those who control power and wealth. Because it involves action and reaction, the situation is by definition dialectical. Evidently, a sluggish economy singles out those in power essentially as privileged groups. To exclude others, the privileged groups must establish norms of selection. Is there a better instrument than ethnicity for the protection of exclusive rights? For ethnicity, being concerned not so much about achievement as about affiliation, eliminates according to ascriptive criteria. In so doing, it provides a traditional shield against free competition. Unlike modernity, which accepts or rejects according to the norms of achievement, restriction or promotion by way of ethnic affiliation has the characteristic effect of protecting privileges.

There is, however, a difference between ethno-nationalism and the ethnicity of those who control power. While the former asserts its particularity and exclusiveness, the ruling ethnicity is coupled with a nationalist language contesting exclusion. The genuine nationalist seed of this language granted, nonetheless acculturation so conditions acceptance that the exclusion is *de facto* reinstated. In other words, the ruling elite will define itself in cultural terms: religion, language, ethnic values become so many distinguishing features conditioning recognition. Thus in Ethiopia, religion excluded Muslim communities from power. The same can be said about Amharic language: compulsory in schools and state institutions, it has no doubt hampered all those whose mother tongue was different, thus acting as a principle of selection, and hence of exclusion. Moreover, the identification of political rule with the provision of ethnic traits and values justified ideological biases against the excluded ethnic groups, whose cultures were accordingly demeaned. In short, "admittance into the ranks of the 'power elite' has to be preceded by a sound command of the Amharic

language and a thorough assimilation into the Amhara culture."³¹ To be non-Amhara was thus turned into a handicap, into an illegitimacy removable by forceful Amharization only.

For that reason, ethnicity and centralization coincided in Haile Selassie's regime, so much so that even Amhara participation narrowed. One practice for which Haile Selassie was unanimously blamed was his propensity to nominate Shewans or individuals closely related to the Shewan aristocracy to regional and local positions of power, much to the dismay of non-Shewan Amharas. So ethnicity was not so much an end in itself as a means of supporting centralization. It did so by providing criteria of selection which had the function both of narrowing the access to power and promoting loyal persons only.

Perhaps a question is surfacing, the very one pertaining to the apparent discrepancy between this analysis and the strong affirmation of Ethiopian national identity in the previous chapters. Yet if discrepancy there is, it can only be apparent, since the purpose of this analysis is to show how the misfired modernization of Ethiopia has gravely damaged Ethiopian identity. To understand how the imperial system, once a pillar of Ethiopian unity, has come to be overthrown, it is imperative, I believe, to assess the extent to which Ethiopian values and beliefs were undermined by Haile Selassie's autocracy and subsequent reactions. More often than not, scholars do not fully realize the wide gap separating traditional Ethiopia from Haile Selassie's Ethiopia. Everything appeared as though the nation had been literally uprooted and pitchforked into a different world whose soil was not so conducive to its growth.

Since the causes which overthrew Haile Selassie were the products of his own regime, of its failed modernization, to depict the deposition as the outcome of progressive groups defeating reactionary forces is frankly erroneous. The former were not so much new forces as wastes of the Haile Selassie's regime so that the overthrow was not a move imparted by a progressist inspiration. This sterility explains the indiscriminate iconoclastic attitude of the so-called progressive forces. Not only Haile Selassie, but also Ethiopian history, the Orthodox Church, even Ethiopian identity and values were debunked without mercy. In the end, nothing was left of which Ethiopians could be proud.

Unsurprisingly, the revolution of 1974 wanted to smash everything and start anew. It reasoned not in terms of salvaging Ethiopian values by way of modernization, but in terms of a new and bright future whose

relation with Ethiopia was dubious, to say the least. What could be more suicidal than the conviction that Ethiopia cannot modernize unless it changes its personality? This need for otherness indicates the depth of the identity crisis, the distortion and falsification that Ethiopian values have undergone during the so-called modernizing autocracy of Haile Selassie. This identity crisis paved the way for ethno-nationalism almost by default.

We can thus establish the following: the causes which brought down the monarchy are none other than those stemming from the mutilation of Ethiopian values and identity. In a word, the fall of the monarchy is a direct consequence of the decline of the survival power of Ethiopia. Previous analyses have emphasized the important contribution of social mobility to the survival of Ethiopia. In allowing power struggle, the traditional society had avoided exclusion (i.e., the politicization of ethnic particularities) and hence the rise of ethno-nationalism. Likewise, to social mobility went the merit of having averted social revolutions, just as it had provided Ethiopia with a tested leadership. All these positive attributes of social mobility meant one thing: Ethiopia survived because it was an open society in which power was made into an object of competition rather than a principle of exclusion based on inheritance or ethnic privileges. None of these attributes was preserved in the society of Haile Selassie. The results were leadership crisis, disunity, ideological uncertainty, and, to crown it all, social revolution.

If peasant uprisings increasingly assumed during Haile Selassie's reign a revolutionary intent practically unknown before, the explanation lies in centralization and in the worsening of peasant conditions. "The increased politicization of the peasantry must be attributed primarily to state intervention,"³² writes Gebru. The intervention created new grievances, such as those related to the fixed calculation of taxes regardless of changing conditions, to payment in cash instead of in kind. Growing privatization of land led to displacement and expropriation, most of all to the breakup of the traditional patron-client relationship between peasants and lords, which relationship had greatly contributed to the appeasement of conflicts in the past. Modern sectors of commercial agriculture began to compete against traditional agriculture to the detriment of peasant products.

Above all, privatization of land ownership brought about a freeze on class distinctions, hence the blockage of social mobility. There was no way by which ambitious peasants could hope to rise to higher positions. A peasant was to remain a peasant, and the notion of *idil* was removed from

the scales of society. Social mobility once barred, the preference for individualism over ethnicity had lost its *raison d'être*. The hindrance was greater in urban life: ambitious individuals, especially from the educated elite, "increasingly found [their] ambition blocked by the earlier, higher status bourgeois-military elite which formed the cornerstone of Haile Selassie's regime."³³ The flexible and pragmatic sociopolitical order of traditional Ethiopia was replaced by a solidified class society working according to military and bureaucratic principles and controlled by people in the pay of the emperor.

The obstruction of social mobility created the handicap which, according to me, was the major cause for Haile Selassie's fall, namely the crisis, the lack of able leadership. The extreme personalization of power and the absence of devolution of responsibility had already deprived the regime of the habit of concerted leadership. Add to this the selection of people more for their loyalty than for their merit, and you will have the vision of a regime so surrounded by inefficient, corrupt, and self-effacing people that it was bound to lose touch with reality. When the major crisis occurred, nobody could plan and lead an effective defense of the regime.

In the traditional society, the absence of hereditary nobility and the association of office with military valor had established a leadership based on real merit. When through centralization the state appropriated all military and administrative functions, the nobles became, so to speak, "unemployed."³⁴ To coax them into submission, Haile Selassie bribed them with grants of land and honorific titles, thus pushing them towards unbridled consumption and lust for luxury. As a result, they became rapacious, worsening the peasant condition without even assuming any productive role. While in the traditional system the surplus extracted from peasants was used to fulfill administrative and military obligations and to reward followers, in the society of Haile Selassie, it had no appreciable social purpose other than furthering personal consumption and interest. In thus cajoling the nobles into becoming fat like Easter sheep, to use Afework's expression, Haile Selassie had obtained what he wanted, with the disastrous effect of depriving the country of responsible, duty-driven, and tested leadership.

Failing to modernize the nobility, one would expect from Haile Selassie the creation of a substitute elite of his own. In fact, he did create his own elite, composed partly of individuals from the old nobility, especially of Shewan origin, and partly of careerists, more-or-less Western educated.

The task of creating his own elite had been facilitated by the dissipation of his most determined and powerful opponents in the old nobility and by his consummate skill of fomenting intrigues and plots by which he divided and incapacitated the whole nobility. Indeed, powerful members of the nobility had been either killed by the Italians or disgraced by collaboration. This cleansing of the traditional elite enabled Haile Selassie to get down to the task of fashioning his own elite. For this he used one and only one principle—"loyalty"—as "the basic criterion"³⁵ of selection. What was the outcome? Careerism, greed, flattery, submissiveness, and inefficiency infected the whole bureaucratic and military apparatus from top to bottom. Is it surprising that such a cardboard regime was overthrown by students and a few discontented garrisons?

The absence of a credible and responsible elite was the natural product of the severe imbalance of power generated by modernization. Even though the imperial figure was central, the traditional system had balanced the distribution of power through the fusion of state and Church and the establishment of regional power. Haile Selassie's "modernization" dismissed this entire system of counterbalances, to the advantage of the imperial power alone, with no attempt whatsoever to find a substitute. Yet a modern parliamentary system could have grown from the traditional regional power if it had been refurbished instead of being dismantled. As the imperial power was always soaring all alone, while all the other powers were dwindling, there came a time when the emperor alone so incarnated the regime that it had no existence outside of him. For him to be incapacitated by senility was enough to cause the collapse of the whole edifice.

Here we can see clearly the divergent paths taken by Japan and Ethiopia. Whereas the imperial power in Japan increasingly assumed a mythical role, placing the emperor above factions and making him the exclusive incarnation of national identity and interest, the appropriation of all powers turned Haile Selassie into a faction, a leader of a party, to the detriment of his image as patron of modernization. Autocracy blocked the possibility of alternative programs of development, and its failure to modernize the country did not signify anything other than the failure of the monarchy. In being involved in the actual exercise of power, the emperor could no longer incarnate national interest, still less emerge as a transcendent arbitrator. The traditional emperorship, understood in its Solomonic sense of being beyond ethnic and regional ties in order to represent the nation, could have been easily modernized in the direction of impartial, national

representation, were the throne less involved in the exercise of power. The mythical sense of the traditional imperial system was thus lost in favor of a militant and partisan emperorship.

Had Haile Selassie and his entourage refrained from engaging in this evolution, much of the problem of integration of Ethiopia would have been avoided. Haile Selassie's partisanship and centralization necessarily suppressed the free expression of regional interests and cultural personalities. A more remote, less involved emperorship would have allowed a large freedom of expression to regional forces through a greater sense of competition and participation. Since, as we have seen, the ethnic problems of Ethiopia involved exclusion from power, the proper way to modernize regional attachments would have been to permit the free (i.e., competitive) exercise of those attachments rather than to impose a forcible centralization and acculturation. In this way, they would have all contributed to the making of modern Ethiopia. Remember the manner in which traditional Ethiopia created a solid national sentiment through the equal entitlement to power of all regional forces. It established an appealing norm according to which those who rule do so by virtue of their success in the open power game, not by their birth or ethnic reference. The system allowed a multifarious participation in all levels of power of all regional and ethnic forces. This wide participation in political life generated a firmer national feeling than the centralized one. A modern political system such as would permit the free competition of regional forces rather than their suppression was advisable and would have been easier to implement than the straitjacket of centralism.

This kind of evolution would have avoided the discrepancy between the south and the north. Doubtless, the discrepancy was the outcome of centralization. Tenancy appeared in Ethiopia because the conquered territories were declared state property, which, in turn, authorized grants of private land instead of *gult* rights. While the north retained the sense of kinship property, enabling it to resist state encroachment and privatization, state intervention in the south de-communalized land ownership and accelerated the appearance of tenancy. The most disastrous effect of this southern evolution was, as we saw, the postponement of reforms. So long as the ruling elite could pump surplus out of these privatized grants, it had no reason for seeking change, so that the whole country was precipitated into the stalemate of underdevelopment.

Lastly, the growing feeling of the Ethiopians that they no longer control their life, that their independence is but illusory, goes back to the causes which overthrew Haile Selassie. The impact of first British and then American influences on Ethiopia was great throughout Haile Selassie's reign. The deep reason for this stems probably from the decisive role played by the British in restoring Haile Selassie to power after his exile, against the wishes of many leading patriots. Thereafter, Ethiopian national affairs came more and more under the control of powerful Western allies, in particular the American government. This was a basic deviation from the traditional trend which opted for isolation whenever Western encroachment was becoming menacing. Moreover, the contribution of Western aid to the maintenance of autocracy was decisive. Because of this, anti-Western and anti-capitalist feelings ran high. Socialism appeared as the only way out, both to regain independence and to unlock the society. A point was reached at which nationalism became synonymous with being against the monarchy, the Church, Ethiopian values and identity, and capitalism. The road to adventure, to the leap into the unknown, was wide open.

CONFLICT BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Our attempt to explain Haile Selassie's failure to modernize Ethiopia by his assaults on tradition for the purpose of establishing autocratic rule would be greatly fortified, were we to show how effectively the conflict between tradition and modernity had antagonized and paralyzed the whole social fabric, leading to suicidal views and attitudes. But first some theoretical concepts are necessary to articulate the explanation. The problem of development and underdevelopment has inspired a vast literature, strewn with views so diverse and contradictory that they are difficult to generalize. All the same, two main antagonistic lines of thought are usually discerned: they are known as the modernization school and the theory of neo-Marxism.

Comprehending underdevelopment roughly as backwardness, the modernization school insists on the necessity of prior cultural and institutional changes by which (alone it believes) the main cause of underdevelopment (namely, traditional values and attitudes) can be removed. As stated by Norman Long, this school of thought "believes that attitudinal and value changes or re-interpretations of ideology are essential prerequisites to creating a modern society and economy."³⁶ The underlying idea being that

underdevelopment is in the main a product of cultural maladjustment, of all the reasons usually advanced to account for the persistence of poverty, the modernization school selects traditionalism as the decisive one. Since a traditional society "tends to be custom-bound, hierarchical, ascriptive, and unproductive,"³⁷ there could hardly be a greater obstacle to technological innovations and improvement of production methods. All the other shortcomings (low income, lack of capital, unfavorable geographical conditions, social instability, etc.) can act as brakes because innovation is discouraged.

However outdated the various neo-Marxist explanations of underdevelopment may appear today, their theoretical interest is untouched if for no other reason than their resolute opposition to cultural explanations of underdevelopment. Thus, for the dependency school, the appropriation of surplus, and that alone, from traditional societies by advanced capitalist centers accounts for underdevelopment. "The capitalist contradictions and the historical development of the capitalist system have generated underdevelopment in the peripheral satellites whose economic surplus was expropriated,"³⁸ says Andre Gunder Frank. To the more orthodox trend, namely the school referred to as the mode-of-production approach, underdevelopment is rather the product of the articulation of pre-capitalist relations with capitalist structures. The articulated combination of the dominant capitalist mode of production with the subordinate non-capitalist mode of production "'blocks' the expansion of capitalist production relations and full development of the productive forces is impaired."³⁹ In opposition to the dependency school, the emphasis is more on internal blockage than on external impediment.

Even if the neo-Marxist stress on class relations and dependency seems to explain underdevelopment by objective causes, it cannot duck the issue of culture change, inasmuch as the objective reasons can be conceived of as consequences of the persistence of traditional values and institutions. So much is this the case that the objection of the mode-of-production approach to the dependency school is not intelligible unless the cultural instance is at stake. Not only does the concept of articulation recognize the persistence of traditional values and institutions, it also suggests that underdevelopment occurs whenever traditional societies fixate on modernity. Thus, as already claimed by modernization theory, it is not wholly irrelevant to equate underdevelopment with backwardness. Besides, seeing how resolutely neo-Marxist approaches base their analyses on the rejec-

tion of the cultural explanation of underdevelopment, the theoretical and practical failures of socialism may be a confirmation of the organic connection existing between culture and development. At any rate, it is not difficult to deduce from the conflict between tradition and modernity a dualism of norms paralyzing the social fabric and hindering reforms.⁴⁰

Did we not explain the overthrow of Haile Selassie's regime by the blockage of autocracy, itself the result of the articulation of a traditional polity with modern means? This dualism disfigured the traditional society without imparting to it any dynamism. Inevitably, the same modern sectors introduced by Haile Selassie (the army, modern education, urban sectors, etc.) rose against his regime. The articulation had aroused aspirations which it was unable to satisfy owing to its internal blockage. Due to dualism, the blockage was perceived as exclusion.

We also saw how this exclusion took on a revolutionary ethos. What other cause than the conflict between tradition and modernity can explain this revolutionary option? How deep must have been the contradiction between tradition and modernity for people to look for a solution in the rejection of tradition? In other words, modernization theory is right in stressing the importance of the conflict, but wrong in proposing the mere replacement of traditional values by modern ones. This acculturation or Westernization leads directly to the Ethiopian case, to the desire to create a new society on the ruins of the bequeathed one. When people start to see such a conflict without the possibility of salvaging tradition through modernization, then underdevelopment is already established, with alienation at its head.

I see no better way to depict this loss of identity by which a nation progressively slips into underdevelopment than by appealing to Ethiopian modern literature and art. For reasons of convenience, we shall begin with literature, selecting the authors who have most dramatically expressed the conflict between tradition and modernity, without paying too much attention to the solutions they propose. So deep is the estrangement that many do not even see a solution, and those who do are no match for the crisis that they have portrayed so vividly.

Little need be said of the first intellectuals concerning the problem of tradition and modernity. For them, the appropriation of Western technology and institutions did not pose problems. More sensitive to the threat of direct colonialism, they conceived the import of Western methods as a salvation, never imagining (perhaps with the exception of Gebre Hiwot

Baykedagn) the possible negative effects. Modernization was for them a question of mere opening up to the Western world and of political will. Their naivety is quite understandable, considering that underdevelopment had not yet contaminated the Ethiopian soul. However, there was an exception whose weight announced the coming of disaster. Of course, I have in mind Afework Gebre Yesus whose apology of the West and collaboration with the Italians made him "one of the earliest tragedies of intellectual acculturation in Africa."⁴¹

Among the first intellectuals, however, we should mention Heruy, for he detected some elements of the conflict. His language, we know, is sober and the thinking traditional. No iconoclastic attitude to Ethiopian values or critical appraisal of the political system is observed. It would be unfair to ascribe his attitude to political opportunism on the pretext that he had been an important figure of Haile Selassie's regime. No, his genuine admiration for Japan was based on the success of modernization which retained much of Japanese sociocultural system. The analysis of the success made him aware of the incompatibility between modern life and some traditional Ethiopian values, especially those of a religious nature. Hence "his desire to reform the church and to eliminate certain abuses," at times taking "a very critical stand towards the church"⁴² He thus spoke out against such abuses as child-marriage, expensive funeral banquets, huge feasts, arranged marriages, as well as such superstitions as the preference for sorcerer-priests over European doctors or the "evil spell" associated with the use of electronic appliances.

Heruy's criticisms were confined to abuses and popular superstitions; they do not yet foresee a fundamental disagreement between Ethiopian tradition and modernity. For this thinking to occur, the deeper damages of failed modernization had to be in effect. The more modernization was delayed, the greater was the anxiety about the compatibility of tradition with modernity, and the more questionable became the optimism of the first intellectuals. What if tradition is the main obstacle to modernity, to the procurement of the much desired Western knowledge and technology?

One way to resolve this dilemma is the theory of compartmentalization. Though convinced of the hindrance of tradition and of the need for deeper changes, one can still be nostalgic about tradition. The solution is to effect a compartmentalization whereby the spiritual aspect (religious beliefs, customs, and values) are preserved while a growing secularization is undertaken through the separation of the spiritual from the temporal. In this

way, tradition is maintained, but its capacity to hinder the appropriation of Western technology is neutralized. Germachew Tekle Hawariat develops this position in his novel, *Araya*. From the start, Araya wants to go abroad to study because he is aware that traditional education "only gives a spiritual knowledge" which is "not enough to advance towards a higher level of civilization through the improvement of life and the acquisition of knowledge."⁴³ Nevertheless, despite his resolution to throw away all that is obsolete and useless, he admits the strong attachment of people to their tradition: they know that it is "the foundation of their country and honor."⁴⁴

As a matter of fact, Germachew insists on the need to preserve the spiritual and moral heritage of tradition. Basing his analysis on the assumption that civilization has spiritual and material aspects, he finds the West admirable for material achievements, less so for spiritual attainments. This amounts to saying that Ethiopia should welcome the material exploits of the West, but should stick to its tradition with regard to spiritual matters. For, says Araya,

we must be careful not to let change and the rapidity of our progress undermine our basic characters. Because they did not know how to commandeer the new civilization, many strongly gifted peoples have been morally damaged, weakened, and degraded.⁴⁵

This outcome is averted by compartmentalization, believed to be a subtle way of benefiting from Western technology while preserving one's own spiritual heritage. But there is a hitch: where is the clear line of demarcation between the spiritual and the material? Is it possible to compartmentalize human life to the extent of saying this is material, that is spiritual? Because no hard and fast distinction exists, Germachew's discourse is itself bordering on Westernization. Worse yet, compartmentalization is increasing rather than decreasing the clash of tradition with modernity. After all, two kinds of principle now control life: a scientific norm for material affairs, a religious one for spiritual matters. Can these two principles agree? If not, how can the one be prevented from intruding into the realm of the other, thus generating a friction of norms and methods? The theory, we should admit, presents as a solution what is in reality the main problem. To try to nullify so harrowing a confrontation by erecting ramparts is to worsen the alienation and intensify the malaise.

The discord between the appeal to modernization and the attachment to tradition has also been portrayed by Kebede Mikael. Like Germachew,

Kebede applauds the West on its material achievements and advises their rapid appropriation by Ethiopia. But, he warns, Western civilization has also introduced its evils, which are "lust for money, materialism, and atheism."⁴⁶ Hence the need for Ethiopia to preserve its spiritual and moral heritage if it means to counter these evils and be faithful to its identity. What is interesting in Kebede is, therefore, his escalating awareness of the damage caused by the failure of modernization. Alienation, loss of identity, deterioration of the moral standard, avidity for consumption are starting to gnaw at Ethiopian society. Far from benefiting from its overtures to the West, Ethiopia is becoming the victim of modernization.

Can the traditional spirituality and ethics stand up to the so-called Western evils? Kebede's answer is yes, provided "the legacy of the previous civilization" becomes "the strong foundation of the new one."⁴⁷ But how can this happen, given the open antagonism between the two? Since worldliness is not sublimated or renovated by the traditional otherworldliness, modernity cannot be founded on the bequeathed spirituality. Making money is still judged according to traditional canons; it is called greed, materialism (a judgement which is, by the way, a superficial appreciation of capitalism). Yet in his study of Japanese modernization, Kebede had grasped the connection of wealth accumulation with the traditional duty of defending Japan. It was not materialism, but a discharge of duty, realizing at the same time the sublimation of material wealth. So what prevents Kebede from interpreting wealth as a validation of Ethiopian traditional beliefs and values is a mystery. More exactly, it ceases to be a mystery as soon as we understand that the die is cast, that the process of underdevelopment increasingly making Ethiopia the victim of modernization is already in full swing.

Writers of the 60s and 70s will peer into the concrete process by which people fall prey to modernization rather than being profiteers. The theme actually introduces a change in the style of writing. So long as modernization amounted to a desideratum, the style was normative, voluntaristic, if not didactic in the traditional fashion. Ethiopia was believed to be in control of modernization, from which it could only benefit. But as damages accumulate, the sense of controlling and profiting from the process peters out. Objective forces over which the Ethiopians have no control come on the scene. The style of novels becomes "realistic and analytical,"⁴⁸ with a propensity towards "psychological or sociological analysis."⁴⁹ A clear understanding is arrived at: other than being blocked, modernization is in-

sidiously impairing values and beliefs. So, the situation is inverted. Previously one wanted to replace tradition; now one calls for the preservation and revival of tradition in the face of the general disfigurement and decline. The impossibility of modernization without tradition, without a minimum of bequeathed norms, becomes gradually evident.

Such is undoubtedly the main message of Tadesse Liben's novels. He wrote short stories in which he vividly depicted the downward slide of Ethiopian life. In his novel *Jib Nech (She Is a Hyena)*, he shows how little resistant to superstition is the superficial acquisition of modern thinking. The main character, Asefa, is a young and educated Ethiopian. While he was paying a visit to his mother, who lived in the countryside, he fell in love with a young girl from the neighborhood. He inquired about her: his mother told him that she should not be approached, as she was turning into a hyena during the night. Totally incredulous, Asefa became acquainted with the girl. One night, however, he could not find her beside him, nor in the house. That was enough for Asefa. "She made me sleep and went to join the other hyenas, he said."⁵⁰ On her return, the girl, surprised that he had accepted the story, reminds him how cogently he had held that neither the Bible nor science gives ground for such a belief. Superficial modernization is worse than traditionalism: it is unable to withstand the slightest ordeal because it is not in possession of itself. In not being properly assimilated, it lacks firmness and invites inconsistencies. This is more damaging than the ignorance of traditionalism.

In the *Yetetebese Fire (The Uprooted One)*, Tadesse Liben dramatizes the implications of Westernization. It is the story of a family which sacrificed everything to send the elder daughter, Roman, to Europe for further studies. As the father is dead, the mother and her two children worked hard, saved, even deprived themselves of necessities to gather the required sum of money. In her first letter after her departure, Roman expresses admiration for the achievements of European countries, but also her pride in her country despite its backwardness. Above all, she reassures her mother: "I will never forget why I came here, and what is my entrustment."⁵¹

She returns after eight years. She has completely changed, physically of course, but even more so morally and psychologically. She will flatly refuse to live in the family house, preferring a modern hotel. She is hardly willing to use her native language, choosing to speak in English, even though her mother does not understand a word of it. She even wiped her cheek with a handkerchief when her mother kissed her. Unable to endure

it no longer, the mother will angrily utter these words: "Tell me! Tell me! What is this education of which you are so proud? Is it arrogance, contempt, haughtiness?"⁵²

As the title indicates, *Yetetebese Fire* is a severe criticism of those young Ethiopians who undergo a process of Westernization which completely alienates them from their society. They do not return from abroad with a useful knowledge, but with contempt for their compatriots, rendering themselves even more useless. Because they are cut off from their tradition, they lose the sense of obligation towards the society which educated them. The education was a mission, an entrustment: they were to go abroad to glean the benefits of Western technology for the good of their country. The mission is discarded; worse, it is transformed into an attitude of superiority, so akin to the mentality of European colonialism. The agents of modernization turn out to be its spoilers.

In his other short novel, *Lelaw Menged (The Other Way)*, Tadesse vehemently denounces the practice of favoritism and nepotism in the bureaucratic apparatus. In the *Lelaw Sew (The Other Man)*, he condemns the embezzlement of public money and the way the whole bureaucratic apparatus conspires to cover up the practice. The message is clear: so far, modernization has only meant the regression of morality in all its aspects. And without morality, a successful modernization is utterly unthinkable. When the educated elite becomes irresponsible, selfish, and alien to the sense of duty, can the hope of seeing Ethiopia on the road to progress still be kept alive?

Another Ethiopian novelist who has fiercely denounced the moral bankruptcy of the educated elite is Berhanu Zerihun. One of his novels, *Yeinba Debdabewoch (Letters of Tears)*, relates the story of a young and beautiful peasant girl, Abeba, who has left her husband and son for the attractions of Addis Ababa. She was seduced by a young and educated man by the name of Teshane. At first, she enjoyed the attractions and luxury of modern life; but very soon, she encountered problems in her social life. Because of her peasant background, she could neither discuss properly in the educated society, nor speak a foreign language, nor even learn how to dance. She became an object of ridicule and contempt. Seeing these unpleasant social drawbacks, Teshane, who had already enjoyed her enough, expressed the need to put an end to their relationship. So begins for Abeba a life of distress and tragedy. She has no other choice than to become a prostitute. She births a son by a man who left her as soon as he heard of

her pregnancy. Her son is killed in a car accident, while she herself loses a leg on her way to send a letter begging her husband for forgiveness. She ends up by becoming a beggar and dies in a miserable condition.

The novel is written in a modern fashion, with psychological and sociological analyses predominating over didactic discourse. The criticism of modernity is concentrated on the educated elite. Teshane has lost all moral sense: he breaks marriage by seducing an innocent girl; his life is devoted to sensuous pursuits, with no commitment to anything but his own pleasure and consumption of luxury. This is how he is described:

He had an important position and a great responsibility. Teshane is a young man who is very weak spiritually and religiously. In his own way, he accepts Darwin's theory. His bad character, a product of his nature, is further invigorated by modern civilization.⁵³

Obviously, for Teshane modernity was not responsibility, hard work, commitment, but enjoyment, selfishness, and irresponsibility. Berhanu traces clearly the origin of this behavior: the educated elite feels so superior to the society that it has lost the sense of accountability. Having no obligation to a society that it so despises, it feels absolutely free to break its rules and laws: its own interest and enjoyment take precedence over everything. Up-rootedness is the main cause for this kind of behavior. Had it not been for his petty cause, Teshane could have been compared to some of Dostoevski's characters, to the great breakers of social rules. Needless to say, Teshane and his kind are no agents of modernization: they do not serve society, they ransack it.

A deeper message is obtained if we see how well Abeba symbolizes Ethiopia. Indeed, just as Abeba, Ethiopia is attracted and fascinated by the West, by all its products, style of life, and level of consumption. As Abeba did, it will abandon its identity, beliefs, and commitments to have the taste of Western life. The outcome is the same: alienation, misery, and decline—in a word, underdevelopment, aptly defined as prostitution. If Berhanu and other modern Ethiopian writers are obsessed with the phenomenon of prostitution, it is because, among other things, the figure best depicts the state of Ethiopia—selling itself for the scraps of Western life. These are the thoughts which lured Abeba:

Modern means educated. It is also to be wealthy. Was she not eager to see Addis Ababa? . . . Was she not tantalized by the

amazing spectacle called movie? Did she not desire to enjoy modern life and comfort?⁵⁴

Berhanu is not so much against modernization as against the way it is appropriated. In fact, he craves the effective modernization of Ethiopia. Molvaer writes:

He wants to see his country develop spiritually as well as materially and observes with regret that the morals of the younger generation are deteriorating; but he also attacks abuses of the traditional society.⁵⁵

In other words, Berhanu is no traditionalist: he simply censures the educated people for their eagerness to imitate the West in enjoyment and consumption, less so in hard work, achievement, and responsibility. This sensuousness, induced by what he calls pertinently "superficial urban civilization,"⁵⁶ leads to immorality, and hence to the failure of modernization.

While Berhanu and Tadesse unravel the tragic consequences of uprootedness, Menguistu Lema will emphasize its comic dimension. In his play, *Telfo Bekis* (*Snatch and Run*), Menguistu shows how the conflict between the old and the new can create misunderstandings and confusions which are highly comic. The play focusses on the traditional custom of kidnapping a bride when the refusal of parents or any other obstacle makes marriage impossible. The new thing is that the kidnapping is planned by educated young men. The ideologue of the group, significantly called Bezabeh Tory (overwhelmed by theory), justifies the kidnapping as follows: "It is possible to create a new and higher civilization if we take what is good from Western civilization as well as from our national culture and unite them."⁵⁷ Kidnapping is traditional and requires manly values; it is also in accordance with modernity, since it simplifies marriage and avoids the organization of costly and tedious feasts.

The victim of the kidnapping is Tafesech, literally the kidnapped. Here the first misunderstanding occurs: because her father is rich, the girl is convinced that the purpose of the kidnapping is not marriage but ransom, whereas her father is persuaded, despite the denial of his daughter, that she has been kidnapped willingly in order to force him to consent to the marriage. Another disagreement develops between *Fitewrari* Merne and his son, named Wondayehu (I wished for a man). The father, a traditionalist figure, dreaming that his son and not Bezabeh is responsible for the

kidnapping, speaks highly of his son, who is but a hesitant follower. The apex of confusion is reached when Bezabeh himself, fearful of the consequences of his act, begins to waver. The girl herself will mock him, saying "nothing was more imaginary than your bravery and kidnapping."⁵⁸

Through this comedy, Mengistu exposes the failure to realize the synthesis of modernity and tradition. Those who pride themselves on succeeding at the synthesis do not have the qualities required by tradition. Nor do they have a proper knowledge of modern values, for, as Gelagle (the mediator) reminds them: "You [Bezabeh] should know that marriage according to modern times and marriage according to the past are different. The difference is love."⁵⁹ So that, being neither modern nor traditionalist, they only succeed in being a caricature of both. They conjure up tradition, but they are not up to its expectations. They claim to be modern while having only a shallow knowledge of modernity. The outcome is uninterrupted confusion and inconsistency. The determination with which Mengistu exposes the paralyzing effect of the confrontation between the old and the new must not mislead us into believing that he is a traditionalist. He is simply forwarding the need for an assertive identity to achieve modernization. The syncretism, so dearly hoped, between Western and traditional values must rest on a firm cultural identity, under pain of turning into a sad comedy and caricature. According to Mengistu, for syncretism to occur "Ethiopian culture must be and remain till the end nationalist in form and progressive in content."⁶⁰

It would not be fair to reduce the literature to the denunciation of uprootedness. Other authors have openly sided with Westernization, attributing the failure of modernization to the wrong policy of Haile Selassie. Even so, uprootedness inspires their political invective. For instance, such is the case of Abe Gobegna. He became famous with his novel, *Alwoledm* (*I Refuse to Be Born*), considered by many critics as revolutionary. One commentator even maintains that "the novel . . . announced the coming of that [1974] revolution more than a decade before it occurred."⁶¹

As the title indicates, while still in his mother's womb, the main character refuses to be born in this society of inequality, exploitation, and oppression. Yet he likes being Ethiopian, for he is proud of Ethiopia's long history of independence, of its indigenous culture and religious fervor. Then, why is he refusing to be born? His answer to his mother is: "Are you telling me to be born so that I may inherit from you poverty, disease, and ignorance?"⁶² Though this refusal to face the tough world is hardly

Ethiopian, it encompasses a criticism of modernization. Riddled with favoritism and nepotism, lacking in fair and just laws, the Ethiopian society is sick with an ill-fitting modernization. In fact, the author comes up with the traditional longing for *idil*. Arguing that "each person has his proper place in the world,"⁶³ he disapproves of the way the forces of today "are highly inflating the *idil* of some while that of others is completely smashed."⁶⁴

This initial rebellious attitude will land the main character in a series of adventures. He will become a defiant trade union leader, then a successful agricultural entrepreneur, finally a revolutionary leader who will be condemned to death by the regime. Let us note the contradiction between his original desire not to be born and the later revolutionary commitments. The riddle is solved if we assign to the author the deliberate intention of presenting his hero as a peculiar character, almost as an outsider. Thus, he has no family; he becomes successful in a risky enterprise. In religious matters, his views are odd for a person who professes a strong attachment to Ethiopia and to the notion of God. Asked about his religion, his reply is: "I will not join any religious group before I have examined all the sources of religious beliefs and studied all the religious books."⁶⁵ Another aspect of his abnormality is his absolute opposition to all forms of prohibition, arguing that if "after having created human beings with desire, the good Lord is prohibiting its satisfaction,"⁶⁶ then there would be no difference between Him and the devil.

The refusal of birth, therefore, dramatizes the degree of estrangement existing between individual aspirations and the society as fashioned by Haile Selassie's regime. The favoritism and corruption of the bureaucracy are such that the Ethiopian society has ceased to be an open society. Not only have opportunities narrowed, but they give the advantage to those who are already well placed, so that the see-saw of *idil* is banished from the society. Abe Gobegna understands clearly how compatible the traditional belief in *idil* is with a competitive and free modern society. His success as an agricultural entrepreneur is evidenced by his depicting the vanity of noble birth. A society made in the image of *idil* would be a modern society where indeed "only great work is sign of greatness."⁶⁷

But things have so changed that the Ethiopians who come into this world do not recognize their society, culture, and values: they should refuse to be born. The mother of the hero asks: "How do you know what will be your *idil* my son?"⁶⁸ But the hero knows how negligible the place of *idil* is in the bureaucratic and corrupt society. Thus, the curse of being revolu-

tionary hangs over the Ethiopians, and death is the destiny of the hero. Just as individuals do not control their life, so too the society, eroded by a revolutionary spirit, has no hold on its future. There was a *coup d'état*; already people talk about the rise of other opponents.

One question remains: Why does Abe Gobegna turn the main character into a peculiar figure? Is it to suggest that eccentricity is a prerequisite of a revolutionary? Or is it that elements of uprootedness have so sapped the society that it can but produce outcasts? Probably both reasons are valid, and this conclusion leads us to examine a novel that we have already discussed, namely *Fikre Iske Mekaber*, in which the criticism of society is incumbent upon an outcast.

We are familiar with the way the novel describes the character of a reactionary nobleman. Nostalgic for the past, *Fitewrari Meshesha* is proud of his birth, and detests all that is not warlike and noble. The love of his daughter for a young man of common origin is for him inadmissible. Hence the whole tragedy designed to show how both lovers are the victims of an obsolete system. Besides, Seble is quite aware of her situation: "If being of noble birth is being imprisoned like me and not being able to do what one wishes to do, then being of noble birth is a punishment worse than all kinds of punishments."⁶⁹ The outdated ideas of Meshesha, his inability to understand modern values, and his stubbornness to preserve privileges at all costs certainly herald the revolution.

However adequately the conflict between tradition and modernity may be described, unlike other authors, Addis criticizes the Ethiopian society not so much for alienating itself from its tradition, as for refusing change, for sticking rigidly to its past values and customs. The rejection of change will bring disaster, obvious as it is that a society which is unable to change will break up. Thus, Addis recalls much more the position of the first intellectuals who were very impatient for change. Like them, he attributes the difficulties of Ethiopia to the traditionalism of its leadership. Nowhere do we find in the novel the attempt to understand the position of *Fitewrari Meshesha*, still less the idea that he may be a degenerated aristocrat, with little resemblance to those of the past.

Yet like the character of Abe Gobegna, *Fitewrari Meshesha* does not recognize his society. What was best in the traditional society, that is the values of birth and merit, is being superseded by the norms of merchants, heralding the generalization of banality, favoritism, and corruption. When, in the name of modernity, the sagacity of mediocrity replaces the cult of the

hero, nothing less than the essential value of Ethiopia, that by which it survived for so long, is eroded. That is what *Fitewari Meshesha* gathers from the eagerness of the society to dislodge him. He knows his battle is in vain, but he has to fight for what he believes to be most precious. He thus becomes a tragic figure, the real victim of modernization. Because Addis is totally unaware of the danger of uprootedness, of the inevitable accumulation of negative consequences if modernization shatters Ethiopian personality, he presents *Fitewari Meshesha* as a comic and disastrous character.

His spokesman is Gudu Kassa, meaning "the weird." Though noble by birth, Gudu Kassa has become an outcast by his ideas, which are in total contradiction with the environment. As the author says, he "created a world of his own, distinct from the surrounding world, and lived alone among people."⁷⁰ Most of all, his contempt for the existing social order and manners isolates him. He professes democratic ideas and condemns the society which excludes on the ground of birth and class. He also sees the coming danger: "The structure of our society, its order, customs, traditions, and laws were not made like a living social system . . . And if this continues for a long time . . . the whole structure will crumble."⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, he is alone in approving the love of Seble and Bezabeh, all the more so as this approval gives him the occasion to castigate the closed social order of *Fitewari Meshesha*. "In your eyes," he says, "the person who fights poverty by his sweat, effort, and blood and conquers wealth, who therefore is strong and brave enough to become rich by himself, has no value."⁷²

All this still does not indicate why an outcast speaks in favor of modernity. One way, it would seem, of giving an idea of the distance separating the society of *Fitewari Meshesha* from modern views is to entrust the defense of modernity to a weird person. So desperate for change seems to be the author that one must be an outcast to espouse the cause of modernity in such an arrested society. If so, the whole problem stems from the presentation of modernization as a rupture, an escape from tradition, and not as an inner evolution towards the revival and purification of tradition. Surely, so presented, modernity ceases to be attractive and invigorating, even to those who have nothing to lose. In thus allowing an outcast to typify modernity, Addis demonstrates how deeply he is in league, despite formal differences, with the revolutionaries of the 60s and 70s. Moreover, Gudu Kassa does not seem to live according to his principles. Nowhere

do we see him creating wealth by his work. Instead, he is portrayed as a theoretician, little inclined to put his ideas into practice, but always ready to make lofty discourses. We recognize many of the defects of the revolutionaries who failed when practice pressurized them.

What other reason than uprootedness can persuade the author to select Gudu Kassa as the spokesman of modernity? For we do not see why the same ideas of democracy and achievement cannot be defended by a sober, socially and practically involved person. If modernity must take the form of weirdness, the explanation according to which Gudu Kassa personifies the need for radical change is not sufficient. This kind of radicalism repels rather than attracts change. May it not be conjectured, then, that the tragedy of Ethiopia sprang not from the refusal of modernity, but from the fact that modernity took on the form of Gudu Kassa, and hence meant the negation of its personality and values rather than their enhancement? Uprootedness, and that alone, explains why modernity assumes a fantastic character, thereby becoming less of an evolution and more of a divestment of personality.

The revolutionary literature is compelled to stage outcasts and intellectuals because it is short of particular class support. The popular classes with which it wants to identify can hardly read. As to the urban petty bourgeoisie, it finds none of its aspirations in this kind of literature. So the revolutionary literature has no other choice than to present the hero as an outcast. Yet this marginalization should indicate a serious sociological and political error: the total lack of class support. Because "in their evaluations of society, many writers of fiction are more critical than constructive,"⁷³ because also none of the existing classes support the change, we do not see how "the desired social rebirth and new prosperity will be brought about."⁷⁴ A change personified by outcasts is more than idealistic, it is filled with a destructive intention. The destructive attitude is never perceived, veiled as it is by sentiments of generosity and dedication. In point of fact, calling this hatred revolution does not alter its nature: it is the vision of outcasts intent on tearing into pieces what it claims to rescue.

More than literature, Ethiopian contemporary art exalts rupture. Thus, contemporary painting preserves elements of the past, but in such a way that they are distorted, tortured, and exploded, making the rupture even more vivid. Indeed, in the paintings of Gebre Kristos Desta, Skunder Bogossian, Zerihun Yetmgeta, Tesfaye Tessema, etc., traditional aspects are easily discernible. There is an obvious tendency towards the wax-and-

gold presentation, that is, a superimposition of outer appearance on hidden meaning. The use of calligraphic shapes, the preference for bright colors and unrealistic, abstract forms, all reminiscent of the traditional painting, and upheld by the use of modern techniques, elaborate the traditional symbolism to the point of sophistication.

Yet, the inspiration remaining traditional, it would be wrong to ascribe the modernity of the art to the use of modern, Western techniques. No doubt, Western techniques have introduced perspective and notable improvements in the fashioning of shapes and figures; but these innovations are also providing an inspiration which is no longer traditional. The traditional inspiration, focussing on religious content, used, as we saw, abstraction, flatness, geometrism to express Ethiopian piety. The power of light piercing through bodies almost without flesh or density represented the overwhelming power of God in a world conceived of as mere instrument. In modern art, the religious theme is no longer central. On the other hand, we are struck by the ordeal, the difficulty in uniting two worlds, no longer the spiritual and the temporal, but now the traditional and the Western worlds. In art, as in literature, the underlying theme remains the conflict between tradition and modernity.

The conflict is often felt as a failure. Hence the violence and anger which overwhelm modern paintings. Nothing is fixed, serene, and restrained; rather, everything is in a state of explosion and dispersion. Manifestly, the two worlds do not harmonize. Contrary to Jean Kennedy's assessment, according to which modern Ethiopian artists "are giving us glimpses of Ethiopian antiquity in concert with today's reality,"⁷⁵ their works expose the failure of the old and the new to syncretize. Behind their sophistication and splendor lurks an insidious and stubborn erosion. If, as Kennedy herself admits, the new interpretations "break out of the mold,"⁷⁶ they can do so only by exploding the mold. Had a synthesis been achieved, the painting would have been less violent and tortured, more composed and rested.

In the past, the Ethiopian artist had no difficulty in "transforming outside influences into his own cultural mood and in creating an art of his own."⁷⁷ A case in point is the successful synthesis of the Gondarine period (17th to 19th centuries). Through the influence of Renaissance or Baroque paintings, traditional Ethiopian painting adopted a more realistic, mobile, and secular trend. Even so, "the Gondarine period did not bring a change in basic artistic canons, nor in traditional attitudes."⁷⁸ Because

the external influence went into the service of the traditional conception, it did not entail uprootedness, nor impatience for change, and was far less of an assault on traditional concepts. The mold did not explode: it absorbed the new.

Among the most celebrated modern artists, Afework Tekle is alone in harboring a true synthetic intention. Though modern by his technique, Afework is traditionalist by his inspiration. Because "he draws inspiration from the old," many critics agree in saying that he "eloquently expresses. . . the last moments of a fading past."⁷⁹ Some go even further by terming his art conservative, nay, reactionary. Yet Afework does not want to accomplish anything other than the enhancement and glorification of tradition by the use of modern means. If many people consider this positive understanding of modernity as a nostalgic vision and prefer the turbulence of revolutionary artists, the fault lies with their conception of modernization. Little wonder they fail to see in Afework's painting a protest against the fate in store for Ethiopia, while this interpretation is as plausible as, or more plausible than the version of nostalgia or conservatism. The way Ethiopian legends, modes of life, and attitudes are painted—the expressive, refined, and eloquent style—can appear as nostalgic only from the viewpoint of uprootedness. In reality, it is a glorification destined to revive commitment and the will to renaissance.

What do these revolutionary critics and art lovers prefer? They prefer the paintings of Gebre Kristos, whose abstractedness "shocked even his own contemporaries"⁸⁰; those of Skinder, defined as the vision of "disintegrating atoms"⁸¹; those of Zerihun, inspired by the breath of an "angry young man."⁸² Need we say that the characters of these paintings express more the failure of modernization than the success of synthesis? The violence, anger, resentment, deception, anguish, and uncertainty that dominate these paintings no doubt render Afework's painting a lagging vision by comparison. However, since no spirit can dwell in such turbulence, the paintings are also in so many ways signifying the refusal to be born; and this brings the same implacable logic: revolution, the overthrow of the old. In effect, most of these paintings convey the idea of explosion and disintegration. The movement which removes the old is not a progress, a procession, but a force of disintegration. According to the sensibilities of the artist, the blast can be seen as either a positive or a negative event. Nonetheless, it is an acknowledgement of failure and impotence that is conveyed, and not, as Chojnacki asserts, "the tenacious stand to preserve the Ethiopian character in its new setting."⁸³ The passion for preservation

was represented by Afework; it was supplanted by the torments of uprootedness.

To conclude, contemporary Ethiopian literature and art did not produce anything resembling the poetical inspiration of negritude. Jean Paul Sartre has shown how negritude amounted to the discovery of pride in being black. Because it announces such a discovery, Sartre defines the inspiration as "evangelical."⁸⁴ Its poetical nature stemmed from the need to glorify blackness in all its aspects, including non-technicalness, backwardness, the scars and sufferings of colonialism. In so being, it was glorification of tradition, a joyful discovery of identity, aiming at revival. The reasons why in Africa negritude failed to fulfill its mission need not detain us here. Suffice it to note that Ethiopia never knew this kind of enthusiasm for tradition. Though it had not been colonized, its identity was no less eroded. How comes it, then, that it did not foster an inspiration similar to negritude? Nothing but loss of attachment to tradition can explain this deficiency, it being hardly possible to magnify and wax poetic about Ethiopia when commitment to its personality is fading away. The option for a critical approach has endowed Ethiopian art with an iconoclastic philosophy, suitable for expressing the depressive mood emanating from the confrontation between tradition and modernity.

THE WAY TO SYNCRETISM

The study of the conflict between tradition and modernity necessarily raises the question of how they can meet. The negative side of this conflict is believed to be traditionalism, conceived of as resistance to change. There is worse, however, inasmuch as a stubborn traditionalism may even yield to the need to modernize. What is disastrous is the loss of identity, the erosion of the inherited culture and the alienation and powerlessness to which it leads. Take the case of education. As everywhere else, modern education in Ethiopia has been conceived of not as a way of strengthening Ethiopian personality, but as Westernization hastening the replacement of old inherited values by modern ideas.

In view of the decisive role of modern education in the generation and, presumably, resolution of the conflict between tradition and modernity, allow me to resort to a digression. It is inspired by the book of Tekeste Negash, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education*, whose theoretical premises and conclusions lend support to the views developed by this study. Just as

this essay stipulates, the author has come to believe that "underdevelopment cannot be overcome until such time when the citizens of a country begin to appreciate their history."⁸⁵ Hence his prescription: as far as education is concerned, "the cultivation of Ethiopian nationalism and patriotism . . . deserves priority."⁸⁶ The suggestion denounces the essentially uprooting role imparted to education by Haile Selassie's regime and the Derg. The implacable assessment of the author is that, in both cases, the purpose of modern education has been to inculcate a "boundless hatred of their country and its society"⁸⁷ on students, resulting in the conviction that they themselves are "infallible semi-gods"⁸⁸ destined for undivided leadership. Tekeste traces back the origin of this megalomania to the ideological vacuum created by the distortion and neglect of the teaching of Ethiopian history. Taught only in grade ten, Ethiopian history was pictured by textbooks, especially by those of the Derg, as the unspeakable reign of a rotten feudal system whose limitless exploitation condemned the country to be one of the poorest nations in the world. Since tradition and the past were blamed for this state of things, the history course amounted to an infusion of "shame, contempt and disgust"⁸⁹ Nowhere was it mentioned that the said society, despite its numerous shortcomings, had evolved "a political state that endured for nearly two thousand years," producing at the same time a rich and varied culture which integrated different ethnic groups into "a functioning political framework."⁹⁰ This grave deficiency prompted Tekeste to speak of a "curriculum" with a "strikingly colonial character"⁹¹ on the strength of the part played by colonial Eurocentrism in the debasement of the history and personality of colonized peoples. Even though, in contrast to the Derg's unhesitating policy of alienation, Haile Selassie had constantly pleaded for an approach balancing tradition and modernity, his project was doomed to failure by his reliance on a massive foreign teaching corps whose commitment to Ethiopian interests was peripheral as well as by his intention to champion the cause of modern education only insofar as it provided trained people in the service of his autocracy. Having opted for dualism, his purpose was to use modern means to enhance some traditional trends.

But some such assignment to education could only exacerbate even more the incompatibility between tradition and modernity. When modernization serves autocracy, the outcome is the blockage of society, which is then blamed on tradition. Once the idea of blaming tradition takes hold of the mind, the ineluctable logic equating modernization with still greater

Westernization follows as a matter of course. The principal institution to implement this programme is the school, especially through scientific education. In the process of modern thinking displacing inherited values, scientific education plays the major role by its corrosive impact on traditional beliefs. This situation, Levine believes, forces people "to cling with increased tenacity to some of the old-fashioned beliefs which are closely identified with the traditional culture."⁹² Yet, had this been the case, the outcome would have been positive. The passionate attachment to tradition would have induced the need to defend it. And the best way for doing so is not to refuse modern education, but to appropriate it so as to turn it into an instrument of tradition. The way to rapid modernization would thus be clear.

In reality, the effect of modern education is not to persuade people to cling to tradition. Very often, uncertainty creeps into their mind, preparing them either for desertion and self-contempt or for irrational, even pathological traditionalism, whose very excess conveys its diversion and impotence. And modernization remains unattainable so long as the repulsion of tradition for modernity is not changed into attraction. As Levine himself suggests, "the integration gaps"⁹³ must be resolved. This means stopping the erosion of tradition in favor of a syncretic course. We can only agree with Levine when he writes:

Thus far the effort to mobilize the resources of Ethiopia's youth on behalf of modernization has proceeded chiefly through the pattern of increased *differentiation*: establishing a structure of secondary socialization separate from that of the traditional structures and thereby transmitting new beliefs, skills, and values to the youth. As yet, relatively little has been done with respect to the problems of devising modes of *integration* commensurate with these new differentiated patterns.⁹⁴

The question is then to know how Ethiopia can move from differentiation to integration so as to emerge from the paralyzing dualism. If we think merely in terms of finding a kind of *modus vivendi* or establishing a form of articulation, the outcome will not be different from the accomplishment of autocracy. The project of accommodating the old to modern ideas and methods achieves neither modernity nor the preservation of tradition. For, whenever traditionalism uses modern methods to preserve tradition, in addition to blocking the process of genuine modernization, it negatively

distorts tradition itself. The procedure always ends up by emphasizing the bad aspects of tradition. Such was the case with autocracy in Ethiopia and elsewhere; it is also the case with all fundamentalist trends. In the end, one gets neither modernity nor tradition, but a hybrid situation which has all the defects of the two without sharing none of their virtues.

This teaches one thing: the mode of integration must be itself modern. And what norms other than scientific could fulfill this requirement? By science we mean the exigency according to which an idea is valid only if it stands the test of worldly success. Grant this definition of science, and you will understand that modern ideas and methods *can* be used to validate traditional longings through worldly success. They do not replace old ideas; nor are old ideas leading them astray. Rather, they become the framework of objectification, the exigency of empirical validation. Essential to this framework is economic growth, since the production of wealth is the highest form of validation by mundane conquest. But what are the forces in need of validation? Obviously beliefs and values, so that a modern form of integration between tradition and modernity is obtained if modernity is conceived of as the framework of corroboration for traditional pursuits. Modernization then becomes not so much a source of inspiration or energy as the resolution to validate in a worldly manner (that is, according to scientific norms) an inherited personality. This mode of integration entails the rationalization of traditional beliefs and values, thus staving off uprootedness as well as traditionalism.⁹⁵ Be it noted here that in no other terms than in those of validation did Marx define the spirit of modernity when he said:

Man must prove the truth, i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely *scholastic* question.⁹⁶

Let us illustrate this idea by an example. One of the main beliefs explaining the survival of Ethiopia is, we said, its assumption of being the elect of God. If modernization means the eviction of this belief in the name of scientificity, the outcome is the draining of Ethiopian spirituality of its stimulus. This is exactly what happened. But suppose that instead of killing the belief, the Ethiopians were summoned to prove their election through worldly success. I let the reader imagine the fervor with which the cause of modernization would have been espoused. Nothing short of the Japanese

determination to appropriate Western technology would have impelled the Ethiopians. Traditional religiosity and worldliness thus integrated, the production and accumulation of wealth would amount to a discharge of duty. This would emancipate economic pursuit from greed and consumption, clearing the way for the appearance of the enterprising mind.

No doubt, this scientific mode of integration calls for radical social reforms. In so saying, I am not putting the cart before the horse. For unless these reforms are responses to an inner spiritual need, no revolution, however radical, no theories of social change, however thorough and scientific, can bring them into existence. How could it be otherwise when reforms are modern only if they become the framework of validation gratifying an inner need?

So far, the universal form of positing the condition of validation is known as the free market, which disentangles economic processes from ideological and political norms. This "separation of economic functions from the broader social context has become the model of modernization as a whole."⁹⁷ Owing to the detachment of the economic from normative rules, the market becomes an "impersonal order,"⁹⁸ thanks to which success can be assessed objectively. Ascriptions, privileges, and methods other than productive investment are normally barred. The democratic system is just the control of the free expression of this type of validation.

For a society to strive to implement these reforms, by which it consents to a growing impersonalization of its instances, it must be already devoured by the need for validation. Otherwise, centralization and bureaucratization are applied in the name of modernization. This was the method of Haile Selassie: power was used not to achieve more power, which would be validation, but to prevent others from having any power. This deceitful modernization is none other than the use of modern means to obliterate what it is supposed to promote: free competition as a necessary condition for corroboration.

The other major institution which, as the imperial throne, would have greatly benefited from the scientific mode of integration is the Ethiopian Church. Scientific education undermined the Church because it did not develop an exegetical approach. Exegesis has enabled European Christianity to overcome the ordeal of modern ideas by absorbing them without being sapped of its basic beliefs. It is the manner religions realize cultural change, the most pertinent example being the Reformation. Granted, European Christianity has been strongly helped by the great idealist phi-

losophers. The contributions of Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, etc., towards the synchronization of Christian beliefs with scientific thinking is indeed remarkable. Had it even been otherwise, exegesis or hermeneutics would nonetheless remain an inner exigency of Christian belief, since it does no more than warn against the danger of taking figurative expression as literal meaning.⁹⁹ Whenever the flexibility of interpretation fails to appropriate modern ideas, at least it softens considerably the conflict between tradition and modernity. Hermeneutics does not signify the adoption of an opportunistic attitude, being but an emanation of the necessary transcendence and mystery of God. As no human being can claim to have understood the words of God once and for all, interpretation is necessarily historical. This historicity is how it tries to perfect itself unceasingly. Thus, loyalty to the very spirit of the belief posits the need for interpretation and, with it, the justification of innovation.

Because the Ethiopian Church never fostered a hermeneutical attitude, modern ideas were a blow to rather than a stimulus for revival. Hunted down by hostile forces, the Church looked for the protection of the state to preserve its supremacy. This protection cost the Church the little autonomy it had secured. As a result, the Church, otherwise admired for its loyalty, was amalgamated with the state and relegated to the camp of reaction. Perhaps more than the reluctance of the imperial throne, it was the paralysis of the Church, caused by the clash of tradition with modernity, that was responsible for the Ethiopian failure to modernize. Given the profound influence it had on the minds of people, especially on the ruling elite, change and successful modernization could not be expected without the Church's blessing. The institution incarnating Ethiopian personality in its most entrenched form had become a fetter. I do not recall any serious attempt on the part of intellectuals or the ruling elite to help the Church reform itself. People demanded roads, schools, hospitals, and factories, but said little in favor of modernizing the institution which epitomizes Ethiopian nationhood. Yet Western technology could neither be assimilated nor efficiently utilized so long as the thinking was lagging behind. The deadlock of the Church was simply the impasse of the Ethiopian mind.

Parallel to religious ideas, other Ethiopian motivations were either left aside or frankly suppressed. Let us just consider two major traditional drives: authority and warlike values. Notwithstanding decided views on the matter, authority is also essential for modernization. Be it modern

bureaucracy, political institution, or enterprise, none functions without respect for authority, even if the criteria are different from the traditional respect. Given the prominence of authority in the traditional society and its importance to modern workings, one sees how Ethiopian modernization was dependent on the renovation of authority, all the more strongly as resistance to change is minimized in authoritarian societies.

As emphasized by scholars, the opposite happened: "One of the major developments to which the modern school system appears to be making an effective contribution is a diminution of the traditional respect for authority."¹⁰⁰ This decline of authority was not confined to schools; it affected all political, social, and economic institutions, including military organizations, so that "the most important outcome of transitional experience in Ethiopia has been a weakening of the power of authority figures."¹⁰¹ How did this come about? The pressure of egalitarian ideas have no doubt been active. Even so, this explanation is misleading, for in a healthy democratic evolution, beliefs in egalitarian ideas do not exclude respect for authority. What happened in Ethiopia was not harmless, since authority as such was contested. How did a culture prone to idealize the *tilk sew* (the big man) reach this degree of nihilism?

In addition to the erosive effect of modern education, the depletion of *tilk sew* throughout the country was no less effective in promoting nihilism. The favoritism of Haile Selassie and his obsession for absolute power had emptied all spheres of power of responsible and able people. Positions of power were filled with individuals imbued with careerism and cultivating submissiveness. Their eagerness for corrupt practices was their only competence. Naturally, the Ethiopians ceased to respect authority because those who exercised power did not inspire it. A general feeling of scorn filled the country, especially the young educated elites. The traditional reverence for authority was based on real achieved merit, especially on military valor. The suppression of the traditional criteria changed submissiveness into a necessary quality for social promotion. This reversal of values was to pave the way for the defense of socialist egalitarian ideas by the intellectuals of the 60s and 70s.

A major implication of this negative evolution was the decline of the traditional fighting spirit. We saw how in the traditional society the fighting spirit was organically connected with authority and social mobility. It was not a natural aggressiveness, but a norm instituting the cult of the hero by associating rank and privilege with military prowess. With the decline

of authority and social mobility, the cult of bravery lost its significance. This does not mean that the old fighting spirit should have been preserved. Rather, it should have been modernized by being channelled into new ways, such as business and artistic and intellectual vocations. If Ethiopia had succeeded in directing the fighting spirit into such channels instead of suppressing it, it would have greatly facilitated and accelerated its modernization. For the achieving mind could easily grow from such a fighting spirit: unlike submissiveness and nepotism, saving, productive investment, inventiveness do require dare, aggressiveness, and ambition.

Chapter Seven

TOWARDS A THEORY OF ETHIOPIAN MODERNIZATION

The last chapter having unravelled the problems of the modernization of Ethiopia, the next step is to sketch out the possible solutions. The step is essential for two reasons: first, the problems of modernization are problems pertaining to the survival of Ethiopia. We saw how failures to modernize induced the entire social fabric to a slow process of disintegration. Second, the viability of the country hinges on its prospects of modernization, patent as it is that the history of its survival and the nature of its problems posit no other exit than through the high road. The knowledge of its real potentialities is therefore a necessary step. By potentialities we mainly understand cultural ones, for the issue is less a matter of natural resources and economic policy than the question of whether or not the country can get down to serious work.

In terms of natural resources, the country is generally believed to be well off, especially in agricultural potential. If the correct economic policy has not been designed so far, the deep cause is the general inability and malaise dwarfing its natural assets. So that the essential question remains whether or not Ethiopia is able to overcome the conflict between tradition and modernity, whether its culture can be so transformed as to allow the gratification of traditional longings through modern methods and norms. Only thus can it surmount its manifold conflicts as well as its alienation and aloofness. Without some cultural revival and invigoration, none of the problems it faces can be resolved, as the will to do so will remain deficient.

THE SOCIALIST INTERLUDE

Before investigating the manner in which the cultural assets can be woven into a modernizing impulse, the evaluation of the socialist experience, undergone by the country after the overthrow of Haile Selassie, is in order. The reasons for doing so are not difficult to justify. Socialism has been adopted as the appropriate remedy for the ills of the country, such as it had been fashioned by Menelik and Haile Selassie. It is worth knowing whether the solution was suitable to the needs or whether it merely exacerbated the disease. The short duration of the socialist experience and the unprecedented crisis into which it has plunged the Ethiopian society points rather to an aggravation of the inherited problems. The assessment of the experience will therefore highlight even more the nature of the problems, and thereby the appropriateness of the theory of modernization which I intend to propose. For, let it be said at once that the theory draws its viability and strength from the ordeals of the socialist episode. In thus taking into account the effects of socialism, it can claim to reflect a historical outcome, and so avoid a mere speculative construction.

The first difficulty encountered by the project to assess the socialist episode is to know whether the regime installed after the fall of Haile Selassie can accurately be termed socialist. One must be clear about this point before speaking of the failure of the experience in question. Unfortunately, studies of the Ethiopian revolution are not particularly helpful. Judgements are so diverse that no two scholars agree on the nature of the regime.

Thus, Markakis manifested his dislike of the regime by coining the term "garrison socialism." For him, the socialist ideology was "a mixture of idealism, naivety and opportunism,"¹ whereby a group of soldiers tried to legitimize their new power. The real content of the revolution was "state nationalism,"² that is, the preservation of the state against popular forces demanding decentralization and regional autonomy. Because the regime stopped short of reforming the state, it was not comparable to the French or Russian Revolutions. A pertinent proof of this was the violent struggle between the radicals and the Derg. According to Markakis, the radicals were committed to reforming the state through greater decentralization and regional autonomy. They were wiped out by the Derg, which wanted to preserve nothing less than the state of Haile Selassie. The popular echo of socialism was used to underpin the state by an ideology supposed to cut

across ethnic and regional cleavages by appealing to a popular unity based on class solidarity.

Clapham is not happy with the term "garrison socialism." It presents as an anomaly a policy which is in the nature of all modernizing revolutions. Nowhere was this kind of revolution launched against the state; on the contrary, all revolutions inspired by Jacobinism or Leninism were involved in the task of nation-building through centralization and modernization. Viewed from the mainstream of the revolutionary tradition, "rather than as marking a deviation from it, the apparent anomaly of a revolution launched by the state's own servants ceases to be one at all."³

Though Clapham uses the term "revolutionary regime,"⁴ he maintains that its essence is revealed only if we think in terms of continuity, for it "may in many respects be seen as lying in the direct line of succession to a series of centralizing and state strengthening emperors going back to the accession of Tewodros in 1855."⁵ That peripheral peoples (such as the Somali and the Eritreans) resisted this centralizing policy is only too natural. Where, then, is the difference between Markakis and Clapham, since both seem to detect continuity rather than rupture? It lies in the fact that Clapham, rejecting all Marxist concepts, derives the occurrence of the revolution from the logic of Ethiopian history and cultural variables. The real transformations introduced by the regime—all meant to upgrade past efforts—vitiates the term garrison socialism. For, argues Clapham, liberal options were not available. All we can say is that a less brutal regime was possible, but "this brutality did not prevent the establishment of a liberal and democratic system of government—an option which was simply never available."⁶ In short, the regime was neither a betrayal of genuine socialism, nor the prevention of a liberal option, but the necessary outcome of historical continuity.

Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux are also of the opinion that "it is a mistake to see the course of revolution as a series of betrayals and usurpations; they are not voluntaristic enterprises capable of yielding a wide variety of outcomes."⁷ The shortcomings of the regime and its inability to establish full equality between social and ethnic groups are not exclusive to the Ethiopian revolution. No revolution in the world has realized the ideal of a perfect society. This understanding should prevent us from underestimating the magnitude of the social and political transformations which took place in Ethiopia. In fact, Halliday and Molyneux think that the revolution "was reminiscent not of the recent upsurges of the Third World,

but of the classic revolutions of Europe—France in 1789 and the February 1917 revolution in Russian.”⁸ It had one particularity, however: it was a “revolution from above,” that is, “initiated and controlled not by a mass movement but by a sector of the pre-existing state apparatus.”⁹ In emphasizing rupture rather than continuity, this analysis moves away from the theory of garrison socialism as well as from Clapham’s position.

Other authors have come up with their own definition of the regime. But all of them are variations on the trends discussed above. They see it either as a betrayal of socialism, as a reaction against democratic and liberal forces, as a continuity of the imperial state, or as a painful unfolding of socialist policy. So, what will be said about the major trends is also applicable to them.

The most controversial approach seems to be the position of Halliday and Molyneux. Clapham has underlined the difficulty of defining the Ethiopian revolution as a revolution from above. The traditional military and bureaucratic ruling elite did not lead the revolution: it has been completely eliminated. Moreover, the Ethiopian revolution had “a high level of mass participation”¹⁰ all along, a trait uncharacteristic of a revolution from above. In effect, there is a contradiction in comparing the Ethiopian revolution to the French or Russian revolution while calling it a revolution from above: if it was not propelled by popular forces, then the comparison is misleading. Most importantly, the pitiable fall of the Derg’s regime after prolonged political, economic, and military crises hardly supports the qualification of a radical and progressive regime.

The fall of Mengistu’s regime seems, therefore, to corroborate the analysis of Markakis. The refusal of the Derg to reform the state so as to arrive at some kind of decentralization and regional autonomy—in a word, its totalitarian grip on power—has caused its downfall. The collapse of the Derg militates against Clapham’s approach, since the choice of continuity rather than rupture with past methods and goals would seem to have activated the same causes which had overthrown the monarchy. However, the position of Markakis becomes precarious when he suggests that the radicals had the intention of reforming the state and that other options were available. Clapham is strong when he maintains that democratic options and decentralizing policy were possible in rhetoric, but not in reality.

All theoreticians, however, including Markakis, agree that deep transformations have occurred. How could deep transformations be possible when, on the other hand, continuity is said to have prevailed? I see no

other way of reconciling continuity with a change that backfired on the regime than to suggest that the said transformations had actually aggravated the problems. Patently, the wrong policy was applied, as though the society—caught in contradictions and failures—were unable to devise the proper remedy. As its alienation and the loss of spiritual energy grew, its ability to find the proper solution diminished as well. To all appearances, a deep insight is gained if the transformations are seen not so much as a positive drive as the products of the rambling of a sick society. The radicalism of the regime stemmed from the loss of the sense of hierarchy—of the distinction between what was valuable and worthy of preservation and what deserved to be changed. The Ethiopian society was so estranged and torn by internal contradictions that it was ready for a surgical solution involving monstrous ablations. Radical as it was, the treatment was ill-advised, being the outcome of a state of depression and illness.

Paradoxically, Clapham's intimation makes sense: the regime of the Derg was inevitable. Other options were not available because a sick society can be neither creative nor far-sighted. Lacking the imagination and strength to conceive and execute a creative scheme, it looked for a solution only in terms of continuity of the state. Continuity was the easy choice, but believed to be efficient by its radicalization. The more radical the solution, the greater became its alleged curative power. Previous emperors had not done enough to consolidate the state, so that the revolution appeared as the exigency of both continuity and rupture. No better means to realize this exigency could be found than in the measures and ideological stand of the socialist doctrine.

Unfortunately, in the absence of a creative solution, the radicalization was only converting past sins into virtues. For instance, let us take the assumption that the major problem of Ethiopia is ethnicity and the demand for autonomy. At first look, the principles of socialism seem particularly appropriate to solve the problem. Since ethnic oppression is due to a reactionary ruling class which uses ethnicity for the purpose of exclusion, the overthrow of the class rule and the establishment of a popular government are most likely to enforce the equality of ethnic groups. Yet this solution is little adapted to the problem. Owing to its universalist ideology and greater need for centralization, socialism is even less apt to accommodate decentralization and regional autonomy than Haile Selassie's regime. The affirmation of identity and particularism, characteristic of ethnic movements, can scarcely fit in with the universalist stature of the proletariat and

its exclusive class consciousness. Neither can regional autonomy, since the principle of class solidarity requires nothing but a centralized political rule.

One may object that this understanding is a perversion, that real socialism can and must promote decentralization and regional autonomy, the latter being but democratic demands. But accepting this objection is never anything more than demanding a creative use of socialism. Of all things, the Ethiopian revolution could not be creative. Otherwise it would not have confined itself to an imitation of the Soviet or Chinese model of socialism. Had it not lost the sense of its own identity, it would have taken into consideration the practice of regional autonomy in traditional Ethiopia and would have developed it into a modern form of government. Instead of this, the option was for greater centralization, which only inflamed the problems inherited from Haile Selassie's government. As Halliday and Molyneux admitted, while the ethnic issue played a secondary role in the overthrow of Haile Selassie, its exacerbation after the revolution is explained by the fact that "far from making concessions to the nationalities, the new state, reflecting the transition from one mode of production to another, was compelled to integrate and centralize."¹¹

If we consider the land reform of the Derg, which has been praised almost unanimously, the same ambiguity transpires. No doubt, the land reform has been popular and radical enough, at least in the south. Its principal merit sprang from the measure it took to erase the discrepancy in land tenure between the north and the south. Bringing to an end the unjust private appropriation of land, it returned the control of land to southern peasant communities. It also established associations thanks to which peasants were supposed to run their own affairs. My criticism of the land reform does not follow the usual reproach, according to which the Derg very soon undermined with centralizing measures the autonomy that it had conceded to peasant associations. The discrepancy between theory and practice is what Siegfried Pausewang denounces when, referring to the gradual transformation of peasant associations into executive organs of the state, he writes: "peasants became frustrated at being unable to defend the local autonomy they had gained for a short period."¹²

The analysis of the failure of Mengistu's regime in terms of divergence of theory from practice falls short of questioning the theory itself. Yet the question of knowing whether the evil was not in the theory, in the conception which opted for a socialist solution, can no longer be discarded. If the evil is in the conception, its practical deviation hardly needs an explana-

tion. In effect, was not the land reform by its very populism a refusal, a sacrifice of modernization? No doubt about it: both by its spirit and organization, the Derg's land reform was opposed to modern motivations and methods. Its deep communalism was out to stifle individualism and the competitive spirit as well as the social basis favoring the renewal of local elites. For a land reform limiting each farm family to a maximum of ten hectares, the motto can only be "self-reliance and downward egalitarianism." In this condition of ideological and social narrowness, the need for improved methods of production becomes pointless. To be sure, the reform corrected a glaring injustice, but only by using principles which were void of imagination and modernizing ethos.

Does this mean that another regime and a different conception of reform were possible? No, for even if in theory a reformist course were visible, no significant social force could support it. In terms of meaningful political forces, the Ethiopian society was divided between the radicals and the reactionary forces. Only this clear perception of a social deadlock can throw light on Clapham's rejection of the possibility of a different course. Hence my diagnosis of a sick society, all set against itself and deprived of renovating, salvational forces. It had to choose between two extremes whose outcomes could only be similar.

There is the suggestion that the land reform was actually a restoration. "Radical as the proclamation on land reform may have been," writes Pausewang, "at least in theory, it in fact echoed and recalled land tenure concepts and practices in Ethiopia before the 19th century."¹³ Unfortunately not even in theory, for the traditional system had built on the communal character of land ownership the *gult* system, which supported an elite and promoted social mobility and related values. The land reform of the Derg had opposite aims. Under the guise of ill-conceived egalitarianism (which is, by the way, highly un-Ethiopian), it prevented social mobility and suppressed the values of competition. Witness the attitude of northern peasants who, to quote Pausewang himself, were "extremely sceptical of the intentions of the reform and withheld support."¹⁴ This was a profound reaction of the culture to the downward egalitarian turn of the revolution. Such was not the Ethiopian way; still less was it that of modernity.

Where a palpable similarity between the state of Haile Selassie and that of the Derg appears is in the institution of the absolute power of one man. Not only had Mengistu replaced Haile Selassie, he had actually managed to have greater control through radical centralizing measures.

The previous chapter explained the fall of Haile Selassie by the crisis of leadership. Still more was this true of Mengistu's regime, the deep reason for his downfall being (according to me) neither military defeat, nor economic crisis, nor the world-wide collapse of socialism. These are rather symptoms of a deeper ruin that Andargachew Tiruneh calls "the politico-military crisis of the state," flowing from "the excessively centralized and autocratic nature of the regime and from the attendant lack of the rule of law."¹⁵ Autocracy and dictatorial temperament isolated Mengistu from the people, but even more so from his own creations: the state and party functionaries.

Here the question of whether the regime was socialist or not loses much of its interest. True, the revolution effected deep transformations of a socialist orientation. But it also produced an autocratic rule, as the inevitable outcome of its own radicalization. While some of these transformations were undoubtedly progressive, all were changed inevitably into instruments of an autocratic rule, which rendered the question of their socialist character quite irrelevant. Just as the modernizing reforms of Haile Selassie were drowned in the mire of autocracy, so too the socialist measures of Mengistu were disfigured beyond recognition by his autocratic goal. May it not be conjectured, then, that the social forces that deposed Haile Selassie became so irritated that they would settle for nothing less than the rapid collapse of Mengistu's regime?

In a nutshell, Mengistu collapsed because he had destroyed what rendered his own rise possible: the Ethiopian social mobility. Though the humble origin of Mengistu was known to all, he rose to the pinnacle of power and gained acceptance according to the traditional canon decreeing the successful winner of the power struggle a legitimate ruler. Had he not dressed up as a socialist ideologue for opportunistic reasons, nothing could have prevented the Church from calling him the elect of God in the traditional sense. Yet, once in power, Mengistu turned against the system: he could no longer tolerate able and ambitious people around him. Surrounded by yes-men, he pursued, banished, imprisoned, or killed all those people who refused to abide by his criteria of selection.

René Lefort wondered whether "the floods of adulation rising from the courtiers surrounding him . . . [do] not each day widen a little more the gulf that separates him from his base and tarnished his popular legitimacy."¹⁶ Dessalegn Rahmato too reminds us how, through persistent purges, imprisonments, and corruption, the Derg destroyed its indispens-

able instrument of power, the military, to the extent that it ceased to be a fighting machine. Especially, notes Dessalegn, "the corruption of the military had reached such a stage that most of the senior officers were thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the soldiery."¹⁷

The leadership crisis was not confined to military and political sectors. It pervaded so extensively the entire society that even the nationalized production units were controlled by inefficient, corrupt, and submissive people, who most of the time owed their position to ethnic ramifications. The regime had dismantled Haile Selassie's elite, but never succeeded in replacing it by a more efficient one. It even worsened the practice, initiated by Haile Selassie, of raising to power people with no local base. Members of the Derg and party officials were given important places in regional and local administration regardless of their capacity and power base. They were simply superimposed on communities over which they had no control whatsoever. Because of this, in times of crisis, none of the regional leaders was able (as formerly in traditional Ethiopia) to muster a fighting force, despite repeated promulgations of national service.

The same applies to the leadership of peasant, urban, and professional associations. In none of these organizations did leadership emerge in an autonomous way, according to criteria of quality and popular acceptance. Elections were actually disguised central nominations of people chosen for their submissiveness, greed, and ethnic connections. The leaders did not have the slightest political or moral authority over the people they were supposed to administer and guide. The total lack of autonomy in these organizations entirely blocked the emergence of able and tested leadership. As a result, never has there been so little place for the traditional concept of *tilk sew* (the big man) and so much contempt and scorn for leaders on the part of the Ethiopians.

No writer has better described the true nature of Mengistu's regime than Bealu Girma in his novel *Oromai (Enough . . . It Is Over)*. In fact, he is the only popular writer who has come up with a critique of the regime while remaining in Ethiopia. This courage cost him his life. At first a staunch supporter of the regime and close to the ruling circle, he became disillusioned, especially after the fiasco of the so-called Red Star Campaign in 1982, designed to end the rebellion in Eritrea through a final military victory combined with a policy of economic revival. According to Bealu, the main reason for the failure of the campaign is the total ineptitude

and decay of the political and military leadership. To quote an Ethiopian commentator on *Oromai*, the campaign failed

because it lacked planning, organization, and conviction on the part of its leaders. Some of these leaders were uneducated and inexperienced, but because they professed their conviction for the revolution they were appointed to governmental posts. Others were simply there to satisfy their hunger for political power and material gain.¹⁸

The fiasco of the Red Star Campaign was only an accelerated picture of the general failure of Mengistu's regime. The persistent reason always stems from the inexperienced, incompetent, above all self-serving, corrupt, and cynical military and political leadership, itself being but the product of autocracy.

Prior events corroborate the veracity of this analysis. When the Derg seized power, predictions of its imminent downfall were quite current. It appeared as a shaky government, weakened by internal contradictions and besieged by a strong leftist opposition as well as by dissident ethnic groups and right-wing forces. Doubtless, it survived by its brutal policy of extermination. But repression could not have the last word, especially in the year 1977, when the Derg was indeed on the verge of collapse. That year added to the already existing tensions the military successes of the Somali army which invaded Ogaden and Harar, of the Eritrean resistance which managed to control the entire province with the exception of Asmara and the ports of Assab and Massawa, of the right-wing opposition led by the EDU which swept over the province of Gonder. Never was the regime in a more precarious and desperate situation. Yet in a very short time, it succeeded in raising an impressive peasant militia, reorganized its standing army (with the help of Soviet and Cuban assistance after a sudden shift in alliance), wiped out internal oppositions, and launched successful counter-attacks defeating the Somali national army and the Eritrean and EDU guerrilla forces.

Compared to the situation in 1991, the Derg's position in 1977 was doubtless more desperate. How then account for its inability to fight back in 1991 a situation which was, all things considered, less disadvantageous? There is only one possible answer: the unprecedented crisis of leadership in 1991. In the early stages, despite strong adverse forces, nobody doubted the fighting spirit of the national army and the quality of its leadership.

Moreover, the fall of Haile Selassie had unleashed the suppressed social mobility: ambitious and committed people saw the opportunity for social promotion, and so leaped into the fray. Lastly, the entire population was galvanized by the promises of socialism and by the need to defend the already acquired rights.

Contrast the situation in 1991. The promises of socialism were all buried and the whole population disillusioned. The lure of social promotion had vanished; worse, social mobility was obstructed by incompetent, corrupt, and cynical people. The fighting spirit of Mengistu's army, despite its impressive arsenal, as well as the competence and dedication of Mengistu himself and of his officers, were regarded with open skepticism. The conclusion stands out: the regime fell not so much by the strength of the opposition as by its own inability to fight back.

In the move towards the elimination of tested leadership, the socialist prejudices against elites and classes, combined with Mengistu's personal resentment against rising individuals, were no less active. Populism had turned mediocrity into a social norm and ambition into a sinful ethos of superiority and exploitation. Mengistu, so the belief went, was eliminating "big men" not out of fear of competition, but for the good of socialism and in the popular interest. This ideological campaign against heroes in the name of equality played a not so negligible role in the establishment of Mengistu's autocracy.

Imagine, then, the depth of the national alienation when, on the refusal to recognize a tested leadership, the regime added the atheist ideology of Marxism. The fact that neither Christian nor Muslim communities could recognize themselves in the ideological discourses of the state has been a major factor in the isolation of the regime. Apart from shattering the traditional unity of Church and state, the discourse has belittled the Church and deeply antagonized popular beliefs. Yet the conclusion that people would be averse to come out in defense of an atheist regime was hardly made. In this respect, what has vitiated the thinking is the popular enthusiasm which greeted the revolution and its new materialist language in its early stages. Many wrongly concluded that religious attachment was in Ethiopia a thing of the past, especially regarding the young and educated Ethiopians. In reality, the enthusiasm for the revolution was triggered by the overthrow of Haile Selassie and the perspective of a better material life; it did not mean the espousal of materialism as a way of life. As the

regime failed to fulfill its promises, its ideology became increasingly hurtful and, ultimately, tantamount to pure provocation and cynicism.

Let it be recalled also that the nonrecognition of autonomous elites could only intensify ethnic tensions. In particular, elites, already impregnated with the idea of autonomy and local particularism, were not prepared to accept the autocracy of Mengistu. While traditional Ethiopia had dealt with dissident elites through recognition and integration into the national power game, Mengistu's regime chose the methods of banishment, imprisonment, and elimination. This entailed the increasing ideological hardening of ethnic origin, from which various forms of ethnonationalism grew. The Derg was even less apt to appeal to the traditional method than was Haile Selassie's regime, as it meant greater decentralization and power sharing.

What is at once comic and tragic is that towards the end, when it was too late, Mengistu resigned himself to correcting some of his mistakes. He attempted a reconciliation with the Church, started peace talks with the guerrilla fighters, initiated a measure of liberal policy and a renewal of elite. The sincerity of the shift can be reasonably doubted, of course, but the fact that Mengistu felt the need for change demonstrates that the mistakes of his regime were those described in this study. In any case, the shift came too late. So depleted of able and committed leaders was the regime that even when the danger was on its doorstep, no gesture of any kind could rekindle the leadership. Mengistu was pointed out as the only culprit by his own courtiers, who were all too ready to sell him out. The end was quite reminiscent of Haile Selassie's fall.

What could have provided Mengistu's regime with a breather? The launching of another upheaval, designed to renew popular commitment and the composition of the elite, would have at least delayed the end. I am thinking of a process similar to Mao's cultural revolution which, admittedly, was orchestrated to reinstate Mao's leadership following a growing internal challenge to his authority. Such a device could have been implemented soon after the fiasco of the Red Star Campaign in Eritrea or after the series of military setbacks in the north. Mengistu's reactions to these disastrous turning points were rather habitual: he physically eliminated some army generals, removed others, including some party officials. He thus refrained from triggering a social tumult, wrongly believing that a mere superficial reshuffling of his elite was enough to redress his regime. Moreover, the sight of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the

socialist camp induced him to conjecture that a disavowal of socialist policy would grant him a respite. What was the outcome? The old elite thus was maintained and Mengistu himself appeared more cynical than ever, producing (against his will) a further breakdown of authority in the country, especially in the army.

In reality, the revolution was in need of a breath of fresh air, mainly through the removal of the discredited elite. A new opportunity for social mobility would have attracted ambitious people, and the result could have been a greater chance for a new lease on life. Mengistu never contemplated this course of action, riveted as he was on the consolidation of his regime. The way he constituted his party (The Workers' Party of Ethiopia) is in this regard quite instructive. Conceptualizing his emergence from the political struggle as a closing and not as a new phase, he formed his party through sheer nomination of his supporters. This amounted to a consecration, giving the impression that the untouchable contours of a closed society were being drawn.

To sum up, Mengistu's pitiable fall was due to the radicalization of his regime, which brought about the complete dethronement of Ethiopian values. The society was so alienated and frustrated and the gap between the elite and the people so wide that the state, as though suspended in the midair, had no authority over the society, save the power of the gun. Knowing the Ethiopian culture, no regime can survive once it has lost its authority. Having no ethnic or class base, the authority of able leadership alone was, as we saw, the foundation of Ethiopian state and integrity. The debunking of authority paved the way for the collapse of the regime. As with Haile Selassie, the same causes produced the same effect.

A short digression is here in order. As already stated, this study is far from sharing the positive idea of Marxism and other schools concerning social revolution. Revolution is not a cure but a further complication. It is the product of a deadlock exhibiting the inability of societies to reform and adjust themselves. Most countries industrialized without having recourse to social revolution, as evinced by Britain and Germany and, outside Europe, by Japan. Let there be no misunderstanding: revolution means here the total overthrow of the ruling class and its ideology as well as the complete transformation of social relations, including property relations. All Western countries have undergone social and political transformations, often of violent nature. But perhaps with the exception of France, none has gone through a complete disruption of the traditional social system, with-

out even sparing the political and value systems. Even concerning France, recent studies have ceased to consider the French Revolution as a necessary event, still less as a positive outcome.¹⁹ France succeeded in averting the ultimate consequences of revolution by reinstating its links with its traditional roots and by adopting the safer course of evolution.

What is one to conclude from this if not that the need to explain why revolutions fail is not really necessary, even after a long duration as in the Soviet case? Either they end up by reviving past practices and beliefs or else they are in turn overthrown, usually by sheer natural disaffection. Rather than being solutions, they are problems, abnormal orientations flowing from their very radicalism. No society can continue with such an internal tear: it must somehow reconcile with itself, its history, and national personality. The attempt to change the Russians into Soviets provoked a dual personality assailed with perpetual conflicts. The Ethiopian revolution was no exception: a new and alien personality being grafted on the traditional one, the two remained in constant tension and misunderstanding. Naturally, a social schizophrenia of such nature contains the principle of its decline within itself.

RETURN TO THE SOURCE

Theories equating modernization more or less with Westernization have failed in Ethiopia, as in all Third World countries. However, the Ethiopian case is interesting, given that the country has gone on to the bitter end of depersonalization and subsequent failings by adopting a radical socialism. Because it has plumbed the depths of uprootedness, the traditional personality has been subjected to an ordeal which created new problems, but also a deep longing for renaissance. My question is as follows: In the light of this highly distressing experience of failure and depersonalization, is it not possible to construct a theory of modernization based on the motto, "Return to the Source"?

The theory would have been utterly idealistic if the return to the source were expected to originate from exhortations. Such is not the case, since the desire is now inscribed in the culture itself, in the wound inflicted by socialism and its failures on Ethiopian pride, further afflicted by the danger of an irreversible marginalization and perhaps of disintegration. In other words, the most persistent Ethiopian determination, namely, the will to survive, is now calling for resurrection. Many signs are already surfac-

ing: the return, especially among the young, of the religious ethos; a strong desire of identification with the traditional culture; above all, the clear perception of an involvement in a process of decline suppressible only by the revival of traditional commitments. Be it noted that the various groups which air ethno-nationalist ideologies exhibit the same desire for revival, so that their pursuit, although otherwise opposing Ethiopian identity, is yet part of the same national urge.

Ethiopian contemporary painting highlights forcefully this desire for renaissance. Represented by such artists as Eshetu Tiruneh, Tadesse Mesfin, Mezgebu Tessema, all deeply traumatized by the recent ordeals of Ethiopia, the artistic inspiration is "centered on Ethiopia's present day condition, in contrast with the glories of the past."²⁰ Because of this, a spiritual calling, which is "intensely nostalgic in spirit and monumental in form,"²¹ emanates from the representation. Characteristically, one painting of Eshetu bears the title "To live or not to live," that of Tadesse "I refuse to accept." Provoked by decline, the mental process of immersion in the past arousing a craving for regeneration could not have been better exposed.

Such a restorationist drive may be viewed as a reactionary mood, as a vain attempt to bring back things already gone. No doubt, there is some such connotation. Yet not only is it harmless so long as its purpose remains renewal, it is also necessary to effect the renaissance. Interestingly, few people think of reviving Haile Selassie's Ethiopia. Most Ethiopians understand that the problems generated by modernization—such as poverty, ethnic strife, depersonalization, loss of status—must find a solution in the context of creative renovation. The return to traditional values must be such that it promotes modernization and solves the inherited problems. Were a government committed to the same ideal in place today, the longing for renaissance would have manifested itself in a forceful manner. If the desire fails to materialize, the cause will again be political rather than the lack of feasibility. It would mean that once again, owing to power struggle and probably the institution of another form of autocracy, the drive towards modernization would have been set aside.

What is conclusive for a theory is not so much its generality, its agreement with existing trends of thought, as its pertinence. General theories are inefficient despite their presumed likelihood because they are too wide. Specifically, they do not take account of events which always particularize processes of change. The ordeals and reversals of recent Ethiopian history

left marks on Ethiopian mentality out of which has risen a cultural—that is, a social—urge to renewal. A theory cannot create this urge, but its impact on the structuralization, the channelling of the social mood can be decisive. Failures in the correct handling of the resurgence can be fatal.

Accordingly, what follows must be viewed as an attempt to contrive a theory of modernization inspired by the cultural aftermath of recent Ethiopian history, ensuing from the socialist experience as well as from Haile Selassie's rule. Besides, nothing exceptional is here announced. The collapse of socialism has everywhere aroused nationalist fervor, sometimes bordering on extremism. The rise of Tigrean and Oromo ethno-nationalist feelings in Ethiopia denotes a comparable process of awakening. Generally speaking, decolonization and the failures of post colonial regimes in the Third World, be they of socialist or liberal leanings, have here and there generated a mood for renewal. Especially, the rise of fundamentalism falls in with the trend of survival. That most of the fundamentalist movements got bogged down in traditionalism and intolerance only highlights the need for an appropriate theory of resurgence, just as they demonstrate how profoundly the depersonalization and withdrawal of status respect (induced by colonialism, Westernization, and impotent post-colonial regimes) have implanted the need for revival.

Restorationist movements fail each time they turn their back on modernity. But since modernization is not Westernization either, the proper position must be to preserve traditional personality and longings, but in a context of changed norms and changed methods of gratification. We have already indicated the spirit of the change: it must be controlled by a rational, scientific principle, namely, the urge to validate beliefs and values through worldly success. This motivation differentiates traditionality from modernity. The need to validate beliefs is common to both, but whereas modernity does so through the conquest of wealth (that is, of the world), traditionality corroborates belief by its power of resistance to worldliness, by a kind of monastic asceticism. Not that people are deaf to worldly attractions, but rather they value the power of their religious and moral beliefs for their otherworldliness. Worldly pursuits remain external to these beliefs and are viewed as attractions to which people succumb. In ethical terms, this is conceptualized as the conflict between sensuous life and spiritual norms. The traditional spirit of Christianity, like that of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, does reflect some such concern.

With the Renaissance, a new way of living out beliefs was born, at least for the Western world. The combination of social movements and the revival of Greek philosophy and rationalism brought about important scientific discoveries, thereby initiating the process of reconciling traditional beliefs and values with mundane pursuits. Science set the tone by translating the control of the material world into a corroboration of conjectures. Through a series of religious, political, and social changes—the most salient being the Reformation, the appearance of European absolutism, and the rise of the bourgeoisie—wealth accumulation evolved from greed and consumption into validation of beliefs. Consequently, moral qualities pertaining to hard work, abstinence, and boldness, all flowing from the necessity of saving and productive investment, were invigorated. This renewal of traditional beliefs and morality by worldly pursuits gave rise to capitalism.

This way of proving oneself worthy of one's commitments implies norms usually called rational. The concept of validation requires the use of objective criteria, given that the notion would become meaningless if wealth accumulation and production were due to privileges, special status, or ascriptive rights. Hence the role of the free market, which is to wealth accumulation and production what testing is for scientific validation. Such being the norms of modernity, a theory of modernization of Ethiopia must inquire into the ways and means by which a similar and inner process of impersonalization can evolve from the cultural instance. It must also detect which aspects of the traditional setup favor or obstruct the process of modernization, with the view of strengthening the positive elements while suppressing—more precisely, sublimating—the negative ones. The force and validity of this theory stem from its promise of an inner, self-induced process of change, unlike acculturation or Westernization, whose failure originates with the imposition of an exogenous and unharmonious type of change.

Let us begin with the political system. The ill-advised overthrow of the monarchy renders the return of the imperial system utterly unrealistic. Nonetheless, the vacuum created by its removal remains. About the functions of the monarchy, two important elements must be kept in mind. First, the throne was one of the pillars of Ethiopian unity. Scholars are heedless of the fact that one of the reasons for the decline of Ethiopian nationalism and the rise of ethno-nationalism is the elimination of the national role of the monarchy. It is imperative to understand that this role is a cultural exigency: in removing the monarchy, one had to be sure to find a substi-

tute. Second, the Ethiopian political system was based on the balance of power between the monarchy and regional lords. The throne played an irreplaceable centripetal role, while regionalism moderated the power of the center. Evidently, there is much to learn from this balance of power: a modern and democratic structure of central and regional powers, equally avoiding autocracy and regional anarchy, can grow from the inherited cultural aptitude. Most importantly, a substitute for the monarchy is highly commendable because all that serves to fortify nationalism against parochialism promotes greater impersonalization, and thus accelerates modernization.

No one should be misled into believing that the removal of Haile Selassie has extirpated the need for such a national figure. True, the majority of the Ethiopian people is now accustomed to living without the monarchy. Even so, in addition to the political problems created by the absence of a uniting symbol, there is a cultural blank in the discourse pertaining to Ethiopian identity and nationalism. Whether one likes it or not, this blank is transmitted to younger generations, who grow up with a truncated idea of their identity. Since cultural matters thrive on historical memory, absences do not vanish but leave blanks. The problem of Ethiopia revolves around the transmission of a culture which is full of holes. Chief among the missing element is the imperial figure. More than its political functions, its symbolic, mythical role remains irreplaceable. With its Solomonic aura, emperorship epitomized national interest and identity well beyond regional and ethnic particularism. As the elect of God, the emperor served as an umbilical cord between the principle of the universe and the Ethiopian people, thus injecting into the Ethiopian mind universalism and the sense of mission. Assuredly, no small emptiness resulted from the ejection of the imperial role.

That said, the question of finding a substitute remains. Of course, the problem would not have arisen, had Haile Selassie pursued a wiser course instead of establishing an autocratic rule. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the institution of autocracy was highly unfortunate. It impaired the Ethiopian way of achieving a balanced distribution of power; it also installed a partisan monarchy, much to the detriment of its national and symbolic function. The only way by which the monarchy could have been revived and modernized was through the accentuation of its traditional national role. The greater its identification with the nation and its values, the more mythical would have been its power. In line with the traditional

thinking making regional and local powers into representatives of the monarchy, it would have emphasized even more its authority to legitimize power by not exercising it directly. In thus being the transcendental incarnation of the nation and the source of power, the monarchy could have prepared the ground for a parliamentary and multiparty system both by authorizing contest for power and consecrating the winner.

Haile Selassie's failure does not prevent the search for a substitute so long as the need is acknowledged. While the possibility of the restoration of the monarchy should not be excluded, a modern presidential figure could serve some function. The problem lies in the mode of designation and legitimization of this presidential power. Neither universal suffrage nor parliamentary nomination (still less party appointment) can endow the office with the necessary mythical and national function. The presidential figure must be the resultant of all Ethiopia's regional, ethnic, religious, class, and professional diversity, the center of consensus of all particularism.

As a matter of course, in order to have a mythical meaning, the presidential role must emerge from a mythical event. In other words, the problem is posed in no different terms than it was during Haile Selassie's reign. The group or the person who now wields power or struggles to control it must create the mythical event by *willingly* relinquishing the direct exercise of power so as to enthrone an autonomous government. This would be the founding act of a new presidential role, the legitimacy and universal acceptance of which would emanate from the extraordinary event of the sacrifice of power. This voluntary deprivation would indeed identify it with the nation by turning it into a center of consensus, into an instance in which any particularism, be it religious, ethnic, etc., is included by definition. In fact, little of the sacrifice is needed to generate the myth, since the whole cultural nostalgia of imperial figure will go to its assistance.

I know the objection: only an extravagant imagination can visualize some such surrender of power. Maybe so. Nevertheless, it did not look extravagant when the same appeal was addressed to Haile Selassie. Nor is it unprecedented, since many monarchs have relinquished their power for the sake of modernization, as in Germany and Japan, and more recently in Spain. Even the case of South Africa, in which the renunciation of power on the part of the whites and the forgiveness of apartheid and its appalling crimes on the part of the Blacks, at least as advocated by the inspiring figure of Nelson Mandela, can be cited as a pertinent example. Contrast

these cases with the policy of the present government of Ethiopia. The ruling party, the EPRDF, did create a presidential figure, but one divested of any real power. While the attempt to institute such a national figure underscores the reality of the need, the fact that the authority is that of a figurehead camouflaging the control of absolute power by the ruling party indicates how constantly in modern Ethiopia real solutions are thwarted by ascriptive group interests and individual infatuation for tyranny.

Yet, at this point of history, no other choice seems tenable. The way regional, ethnic, and religious issues have evolved in Ethiopia entails that neither might nor suffrage can restore the legitimacy of a national power. Only the voluntary surrender of power by those who control Ethiopia and the subsequent popular attachment can give them legitimacy and duration. The problem, I repeat, has been bequeathed by Haile Selassie to all his heirs: what was expected from him is still expected from them. The price for acquiring national stature remains this unbelievable, mythical forsaking of power, for only thus can a group or a person soar above all particularism. Unbelievable does not mean impossible; it simply means sacrifice for the survival and modernization of Ethiopia: it is the call of duty, neither more nor less.

Moreover, assuming that all people are pragmatic, that they tend to prefer what is successful, we find ample evidence in favor of revival. The study of the survival of Ethiopia has shown the extent to which the traditional system was viable. Haile Selassie's system and Mengistu's regime were not workable, as both could not survive. If the traditional system had virtues which enabled it to last for so long and overcome all kinds of ordeals, then the call for its renovation falls within a reasonable form of pragmatism. The pragmatism becomes all the more natural the more people become aware that what is expected from them is a return to genuine personality after an ill-advised wandering. The impact of enlightenment should never be underestimated.

Surely, this political evolution would fully satisfy regionalism. As we have analyzed it, regionalism was a system of power sharing and devolution. As such, it was more adapted to modernization than was centralism. Accordingly, the more the presidential or imperial function is identified with the national identity and interest, the wider becomes the place allotted to the expression of regional and ethnic identities and interests. Just as in traditional Ethiopia, the system will rest on the balance between cen-

tripetal and centrifugal forces. The only additional but important trait will be the adoption by regional and ethnic interests of a parliamentary type of expression whose chief function is to harmonize national and regional issues.

The question as to how the two issues can be harmonized is not difficult to resolve so long as the conditions of the presidential power are respected. Indeed, the political system will be constituted of two poles with different, even contradictory attributes. The one pole (incarnated in the presidential or imperial figure) is mythical and national, the other (represented by the parliament) is factional and diverse. The chaotic centrifugal forces can be harmonized in a symphonic manner with the unitarian centripetal force if the latter, as source of power, imparts its national ethos to the former through the right of selecting its conductor. Thus created, the government does not turn into an instrument of the president, who, as we said, does not exercise direct power. Since the presidential or imperial choice is based on considerations of unity and national interest, the act of nominating a government signifies the delegation of full power and authority to the same government. This delegation is but a renewal of the founding act by which the presidential office relinquishes the direct exercise of power. The act legitimizes the government by entrusting it with the mission of shaping into a symphonic unity the Ethiopian diversity.

Crucial in this proposal is the renewal of Ethiopian traditional nationhood in such a way that it accords with the requirements of modernization. On the one hand, we find the polarization of centripetal and centrifugal forces and their harmonization by the mediation of a mythical figure. On the other, the poles undergo a process of change which modernizes them through enhancement. Thus, in delegating the exercise of power to a different body, the centripetal force enhances its national stature while making its representative accountable to an elected assembly. Inversely, popular suffrage increases the representativeness of centrifugal forces by shaping them into an assembly, that is, into a body governed by norms transcending provincialism. The need to match regional interests with national ones imposes on provincialism the guidance of universal norms.

Can we maintain that these modern versions of the Solomonic myth and regionalism do revive the integrity of the culture? Neither the role of the Church nor the notion of the elect of God seems to transpire in the change. As a matter of fact they do, but in a modern—that is, universalist—language. The separation of Church and state is essentially for the

protection and equality of all religious beliefs. In this way, the traditional role of the Ethiopian state as protector of religious faith is upgraded by being extended to all the religious beliefs of Ethiopia today. The same applies to the notion of the elect of God: its extension to non-Christian communities is only how it develops from particularism into greater universalism. Being potentially universal, Christian concepts have no difficulty in accommodating diversity. Better still, their plasticity can change diversity into an integrated and competitive society, imparting to the notion of election a completely modern connotation.

The method is another way of highlighting the potential of Ethiopian traditional nationhood. The previous chapters have stressed its supra-tribal nature, its emancipation from the criteria of common lineage and language. As a form of nationalism based on the defense of shared beliefs and values, its universalist potential was, so to speak, innate. Even if this nationalism focussed on the defense of Christianity, the very fact of being inspired by a universalist creed has enriched it with a remarkable capability for integration. From the integration of various peoples, a noticeable attribute of Ethiopian culture emerged: syncretism.

All this tends to turn Ethiopian diversity into a blessing rather than a handicap. Nothing could be better suited to appropriate modernity than the renewal of this plastic identity. The study of Ethiopian literature and art has revealed the two inseparable characters of Ethiopian syncretism: the openness to outside influences, controlled by the need to operate syntheses whereby the traditional identity asserts itself. I see no better way to overcome the conflict between tradition and modernity than to mobilize the power of syncretic aptitude. It staves off traditionalism, but without allowing alienation, which hinders initiative and creativity more than the traditionalist attitude. A culture menaced by the loss of identity is capable only of mimicking its model, of being its caricature, less so of asserting itself through creative borrowings. Given that Ethiopia has naturalized Christianity to the extent of producing a multitude of saints and great popular devotion, we fail to see why what was achieved for Christianity would not be possible for modernity.

Bearing in mind that a modern society is an open society where norms of achievement replace ascriptions, one aspect of the traditional society which deserves to be revived is undoubtedly social mobility. The *gult* system, which supported the ruling elite, being dependent on nominations rather than hereditary rights, opened up positions of power to ambitious

and able individuals even as it demoted those who were losing momentum. The ill-disposed modernization of Haile Selassie changed *gult* rights into private ownership of land, propagating tenancy among peasants and parasitism among the nobles. It was followed by the no less disastrous policy of land nationalization of the Derg: the elimination of rural hierarchy favored the resurgence of lineage ideology and group solidarity to the detriment of vertical links, just as it cajoled the peasant community into self-sufficiency and autarky to the great disadvantage of surplus production.

Fortunately, in nationalizing land, the Derg unintentionally created a propitious condition for the return and modernization of the *gult* system. Indeed, the elimination of private tenures removes a major obstacle to the reinstatement of *gult* rights. Before answering the question of how the *gult* system can be modernized, let us indicate briefly why its renovation should be desired. The incomparable advantage of the traditional tax right was the protection of peasants from landlessness. This protection is necessary, especially as peasants are the first victims of misfired modernization. A no less important advantage is the spirit of *gult* rights. We know that they were conditional on the fulfillment of military and administrative duties. This association of privileges with the discharge of duty, this notion of reward for social services must be revived if Ethiopia is to have the leadership of a responsible, duty-minded, and modernizing elite.

So how can the *gult* system be modernized? First of all, this means that all policy of reintroducing private ownership of land in the name of modernization should be resisted energetically. Instead, each would-be entrepreneur will have a usufructuary right over a portion of land commensurate with his material possibility. The land may or may not be occupied by peasants. What matters is the condition attached to the maintenance of the right—to wit, increased productivity of the land. A grant of land, which does not yield the projected increase of productivity after a given time, should be removed immediately and be accompanied by legal punishments for breach of contract. Just as in the traditional system, land grant will be conditional on the discharge of national duties, but measured henceforth in terms of higher productivity and wealth accumulation. The condition will also change the traditional military and administrative service into a modern economic leadership. Doubtless, this evolution will greatly incite entrepreneurs to adopt rational methods through saving, innovation, and the use of modern means. Incentives on the part of the state, such as low-interest loans, tax reductions, etc., will invigorate the sense of national mission.

Rest assured, the system will not exclude the interests of peasants and workers. Entrepreneurs cannot improve their production without the active participation of peasants and workers, without in fact entering into some kind of contractual agreement with them. The contribution of workers, therefore their well-being, conditions the fulfillment of their national contract, hence the maintenance of their privileges. In case the entrepreneur is granted a land already occupied by peasants, the state will see to it that under no condition will peasants be expropriated of their holding or *rist*. The entrepreneur is in this case more like a hired manager who organizes and modernizes the production of peasants than a private owner.

As to the personal interest of entrepreneurs, in addition to obtaining the renewal of land grant, the increase and enjoyment of their own income will naturally be proportional to the success of their endeavor. Essential is the understanding of right and enjoyment as reward for contribution to the national wealth, and not as ascriptive privileges. Naturally, the system also applies to factories: the endowment of building land with the natural resources and the favorable loans granted by the state to create or expand factories on the basis of initial capital and expertise on the part of would-be entrepreneurs are all liable to generate the same kind of obligation. The point being that land and its resources are priceless because they are communal, any benefit drawn directly or indirectly from them burdens the beneficiary with national obligations. This creates a type of capitalism more adapted to the cultural premisses of Ethiopia: the drive for profit is based not on private property, but on the renovated notions of *rist* and *gult*. This renovation is expected to arouse dynamism and fervor, for it does no more than transform into economic pursuit the traditional longing, still vivid, for political office.

Closely associated with social mobility was the traditional conception of power as object of competition. The way to modernize this political system was not to institute hereditary rights in the style of Haile Selassie or to make promotion dependent on personal allegiance as did Mengistu. In both cases, the spirit of competition and achievement, so essential for modernity, was suppressed. Happily, the radical measures of the Derg have once more dissolved the social rigidity of Haile Selassie's regime. The revolutionary upheaval, by its very uncertainty, has restored a measure of fluidity appropriate for the restoration of the traditional power game. We need only to change the canon of the traditional competition to effect its modernization.

With respect to the establishment of a modern political system, the major difficulty is always to persuade people, especially those in power, into recognizing power as an object of competition. We saw how the Ethiopians are culturally receptive to this idea. The problem with them was the dependence of political promotion on war merit and patronage. Yet the mere replacement of these traditional criteria by popular suffrage will not be enough to introduce the accountability of a democratic system. The cultural sanction will be missing, since the Ethiopian accountability is essentially vertical and gratified through the multiplication of followers. The simple extrapolation of Western criteria when the cultural prerequisites are not conducive will only result in the caricature of democracy, as evinced by the disfigurements of democratic experience in Africa.

Imperative, therefore, is the enforcement of popular suffrage by a modern system of vertical accountability and clientelism. This means a parcellization of power such that elected local and regional political leaders will have the right to grant land and various facilities to their followers. The modernization of this traditional clientelism hangs on the requirements of vertical accountability. If this accountability is expressed in terms of economic and social objectives, such as specific economic targets and social services, entailing the dismissal of leaders and followers whenever the objectives are not met, clientelism will go into the service of modernization. Just as in the traditional system the same right enabled regional and local leaders to muster adequate fighting forces and organize efficient tax collections, so too will clear economic and social objectives persuade the modern regional and local leaders to use their cliental power to promote and reward competent and responsible individuals. If the holding of political offices is really dependent on the fulfillment of specific targets of modernization, then the imperative of efficiency will ward off abusive practices as much as possible, to the great advantage of national and social advancement. Unlike in Western democracies, here popular suffrage does not directly sanction failure. Since accountability is vertical and embedded in specific tasks, the power of sanction must naturally go to the instances which give the assignments. In return, only through the free competition for popular suffrage can political leaders be enthroned.

The proposal renews the traditional system of open society and the grass-roots level of elite recruitment, while vertical accountability unleashes a modern version of Ethiopian clientship. Popular suffrage is vital inasmuch as it can revive the power game and impose the renewal of elites. It

will be to modern Ethiopian society what martial valor used to be to the traditional society: the indispensable objective criteria of selection, the ground for the rising star, for the call of *idil*. The merit of the revival of clientelism flows from the need to curb bureaucratic practices by the injection of the idea of specific assignment. In this system, political leaders do not simply execute orders; it so happens that they have no interest in hindering economic and social dynamism, either. Since the responsibility of materializing the economic and social targets rest on their shoulders, clientelism is the means they have to reward or punish at their level individuals and institutions. Be it recalled that land and all natural resources are not ruled by the law of private property, so that only through the institution of clientelism can merit be rewarded and the accountability of political leaders made functional.

To constitute the social fabric as the open ground for the call of *idil* is, of course, to gratify the essential longing of the Ethiopians. We saw how the stifling of the metaphysical quest for *idil* by the imposition of a rigid class system during Haile Selassie's reign and the dissolution of distinction by the "egalitarian" regime of the Derg had sapped the urge for achievement from Ethiopian mentality. Submissiveness, greed, corruption replaced ambition, dare, and undertaking. The revival of the belief in *idil*, now rendered possible by the revolutionary upheaval, supplies the indispensable spiritual support for modernization. Each according to his/her *idil* means each according to his/her merit or gift, and this greatly accords with the meritocratic character of modern societies. The Ethiopian principle of justice, we noted, is not equality, but distribution according to God's allotment.

So conceived, the notion of *idil* does not yet lend itself to a secular interpretation. The way out is not the critique of the notion, however, but rather the institution of a change in the criteria of validation of the belief. Formerly *idil* was tested essentially through war deeds; now its testing ground becomes economic success. The sense of *idil* is no more confined to the brave warrior, it is upgraded and extended to the economic, understood as test and assignment. If the socioeconomic system is ruled by the norms of free competition, the Ethiopian will have no difficulty in reading into economic success the answer to the quest for one's proper place.

Before leaving this point, let us pay heed to an important implication of this appeal for resurrection. By itself it contains a strong impulse for modernization, there being no doubt that the revival of tradition instead of its

criticism posits a theory of development resting on the ethical notion of duty. Most theories of modernization bet on the unleashing of desires and aspirations to sustain development. If people, they argue, are sufficiently motivated by the prospect of a better material life, it is enough to inspire them to make more money. The trouble with this expectation is that the unleashing of desires may invigorate the longing for wealth, but not necessarily the will, still less the rational methods by which the will must be governed. Corruption, nepotism, robbery, monopolization are also ways of making a fortune, but far removed from the methods of modernity, which are hard work, saving, and innovation in the context of free competition. What defines modernity is not so much the desire for wealth, which is almost universal, as the rational methods used to achieve it.

Rational methods arise if the emancipation of desire serves a cause, if it becomes an enterprise, a process of validation, as we said earlier. An action done for the sake of commitment, in obedience to a higher belief, is called duty. In the accomplishment of duty, the intention as well as the methods used must conform to the spirit of the commitment. For instance, I cannot serve Christian beliefs if I constantly transgress Christian commandments. In the same spirit, for economic pursuit to turn rational while being insatiable, it must assume the character of duty whereby it stands above greed and the frenzy of consumption in order to become saving and investment.

And what would people be willing to serve more than their beliefs and values? Therefore, the revival of tradition is a way of turning economic pursuit into a service, an obligation to a commitment. This commitment, otherwise known as nationalism, has proved its inspiring and combative strength. In placing economic pursuit in the service of tradition, we are therefore harnessing it to a highly motivating human commitment, all the more so as threats make it more pressing. Above all, the proposal provides an elegant solution to the conflict between tradition and modernity by enlisting the latter in the service of the former. Before becoming the emancipation of desires, modernity is first accomplishment of duty. As such, it calls for restraint, hard work, and rational methods of creating wealth.

AN IMPORTUNATE FACTOR OF IMPERSONALIZATION

Our study of the modernizing factors of the traditional culture had stated one condition: for these factors to give birth to modernity, they must be

governed by impersonal rules. The condition is difficult to realize, as it requires the dissolution of ascriptive status and privileges. A theory of development must therefore be particularly attentive to factors, structural or circumstantial, which are liable to foster internally impersonal norms. Western Europe came under the obligation of such norms as a result of its own cultural evolution and its chief product, the scientific mind. From the Renaissance onwards, beliefs and values in the Western world were summoned, under pain of losing credibility, to conform to scientific deontology. One can force Galileo to deny his finding, but one cannot dismiss the surging internal conflict. The West had no option but to rearrange the whole system of beliefs and values, including the social organization, in accordance with scientific acceptability. Modernity grew from this exigency.

For non-Western countries, such as Japan, the substitute for scientific requirement has been the challenge of the West, the fear of colonialism. Since the products of science make for the material power of the West, no other way existed to cope with the challenge than to appropriate Western rationality. We explained how Ethiopia, owing to different political and strategic options, veered off from this course of thinking. The question is to know whether there is still an internal potential calling for rational methods and impersonalization.

In scanning Ethiopian nationhood, this study earmarked a high potential for evolving impersonal criteria, arguing that it is based neither on race nor lineage nor any particularism such as language. The necessity of integrating various peoples must have infused the appeal for universal values into Ethiopian nationhood. In effect, the major attributes of Ethiopian nationhood (that is, allegiance to the imperial throne, Christianity, and social mobility) are unthinkable without a deep-seated universalist tendency. This universalism cannot be expressed otherwise than through the possibility of a direct link between the individual and a universal principle. Rousseau called this principle the general will. Unlike tribal organizations in which clans and sub-clans mediate the membership and social position of individuals while being also the substance of their identity, in modern nationalism the identification is with "a large, anonymous, mobile, (un?) organised mass," which moreover "oblige[s] him [the individual] to be familiar with a standard, normative idiom, not with an idiosyncratic dialect, and to be literate in it."²² The thinking according to which some common natural traits, such as lineage or language, are enough to make a modern nation is mistaken. No doubt, language facilitates integration, but without

the generation of impersonal norms dissolving primordial loyalties (lineage, common dialect, tribal religion, etc.), no modern nation can emerge.

Ethno-nationalism overlooks this normative character of modern nationalism, fixated as it is on idiosyncrasy. In so doing, it repels modernization still further. Conscious of this deficiency, we derived it from exclusion by calling it dissident nationalism. To succeed its transition to modernity, it must erect universal norms which, however, conflict with its ethnic ethos. The more ethno-nationalism is inspired by exclusion and frustration, the greater become its partiality and idiosyncratic personality, and the less able it is to evolve universal norms. So long as the predominance of the natural group over the individual is binding, giving support to the view which considers members of a group as kinspersons rather than partners, the path of modernization is yet out of sight. The nation is not an extension of lineage because it is ruled by different norms. While kinship obligations and affective ties govern lineage, partnership and impersonal norms rule over nations.

In other words, problems of modernization and problems of nation-building are one and the same. In both cases, the issue is to evolve methods of work and communication controlled by impersonal rules. This applies to all Third-World countries, even if inherited cultural traits may hinder or facilitate the process of impersonalization. The Ethiopian supra-tribal consciousness is obviously in favor of it, all the more fervently in that the ills of failed modernization are now challenging national integration. Hence the distortion imparted by the need to control scarce resources through the centralization of power and wealth must be countered with an enlargement of Ethiopian nationhood, which enlargement does no more than coincide with greater impersonalization.

Yet the simple inclusion in the supra-tribal identity of the large Muslim community, on the basis of the separation between religion and state, as well as of the various ethnic groups which came under the Ethiopian state following the southern expansion, would fall short of yielding the expected result. First, it has been practiced so far and has as yet shown little ability to activate modernization. Second, a mere inclusion only persuades the national and ethnic identities to coexist in the form of superposition without setting out for change. Third, this form of national integration is as far removed from generating impersonal norms as anything can be, since it adds identities without synthesizing them.

This does not mean that assimilation should aim at cultural homogenization. Assuming that homogenization is possible, it would amount to a drastic impoverishment of Ethiopia. It would be even less able to generate universal criteria than the traditional system, for in excluding particularities it siphons off the substance of universality. Recall how effectively the traditional identity had originated a national sentiment without suppressing ethnic and regional attachments. Why, then, should we not proceed in the traditional fashion by conceiving ethnic and religious diversities as forms of power-sharing and competition, arbitrated this time by impersonal rules? The acceptance of such a deontology will coerce both ethnic and national identities into a process of change, integrating them more effectively and dynamically.

The basis for this statement is the following consideration: a pressing factor of greater impersonalization emerges from present-day Ethiopia's ethnic and religious diversity and subsequent problems. The need is such that the path to its modernization graciously coincides with the resolution of said problems. This amounts to saying that ethnic and religious diversity should gratify according to universalist criteria whose embodiment is none other than the nation. In thus growing into an impersonal ground for the objective validation of diverse idiosyncratic ethoi, the nation is revived, enlarged, and replete with promise.

A CASE OF SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION: THE GURAGE

The above statement is no speculation: it actually took place in Ethiopia by the medium of a minority ethnic group known as the Gurage. Owing to their dialect, the Gurage are believed to be of Semitic origin. This gave rise to the supposition that they are descendants of an ancient Tigrean colony cut off from the north.²³ Though relations with the north were never entirely interrupted, the Gurage were integrated into the Ethiopian state after Menelik's conquest. A salient characteristic of the Gurage is that they are considered "to be the most industrious of the Semitic peoples."²⁴ To be sure, this economic activism, manifested essentially through efficient trade practices and the total absence of disdain for material works, can be explained by the scarcity and poverty of arable land, which provoked their migration to almost all parts of Ethiopia.

This explanation is partial, for other ethnic groups living in comparable conditions did not produce the business acumen of the Gurage. No,

the explanation must include Gurage's perception of themselves and the treatment to which they were subjected. In the first place, the scourge of slavery has affected the Gurage more than any other ethnic groups in Ethiopia. Much appreciated in Arabia, where they were known as "red Ethiopians,"²⁵ especially for the beauty of their women, the Gurage were "the most important target of slavers."²⁶ After their inclusion in the Ethiopian empire, their dispersal throughout Ethiopia, their wretched status, and their readiness to accept any kind of job turned them into a discredited group to the point that the name "Gurage" became an insult.

Yet, in record time, the Gurage, who had started by opening small shops, rapidly and amazingly gained control over important sectors of commerce and industry. As a result, people began "to look with increasing respect upon the Guragés."²⁷ What is the explanation of this rapid success? (Our aim here is not to study the business method of the Gurage, which rests on hard work, saving, group solidarity, and devotion to the family enterprise. Such a study would require a systematic inquiry into their traditional culture and value system.) Simply, we want to understand the origin of their strong motivation for business.

That the Gurage are descendants of a previous colony implies the consideration of themselves as conquerors. Add to this the strong impression of being distinct from neighboring peoples by their physical features as well as by their mode of life, and you will have a tribe with "high esteem" of itself and great "ethnic consciousness and pride."²⁸ Slavery, Menelik's conquest, and contempt after integration have all conspired to bring about what Hagen calls a "withdrawal of status respect."²⁹ Consequently, business appeared to the Gurage as the only way of regaining their lost status and esteem. Their ethics of work and saving, their group and family solidarity, their willingness to accept any kind of job demonstrate how squarely making money and worldly success are perceived by them as means of reinstating their traditional pride.

Most relevant to our topic is the attachment of the Gurage to their traditional links and culture. Yet this attachment is matched only by their wholehearted adherence to Ethiopian nationhood. Their nationalism confirms how well they are a model of successful integration. They owe their economic success exclusively to their own work. Far from relying on political assistance or on privileges and ascriptive rights, they had to overcome many obstacles. In so striving, they fostered the consciousness of impartial rules and the preference of achievement over status. Whereas the most

important ethnic groups, that is, the Amhara, the Oromo, and the Tigre, were vying for the conquest or maintenance of privileges and ascriptions, the Gurage saw success flowing from work and achievement.

Their nationalism is the product of the conquest of success in a hostile land, where they had to learn the method of impersonal rules. Success meant for them transcending ethnic limitation for the larger, impersonal society in which the conquest of position passed through the ordeal of competition. Their devotion to Ethiopian nationhood originated from the association of hard work with the reward of worldly success. Ethiopia became for them a land of opportunities, a kind of raw expanse destined to be subdued by hard work and saving. In short, it appeared as a testing ground for their own self-assertion, the objective validation of their ethos. Thus, a dynamic synthesis of traditional ethnic personality and Ethiopian identity was achieved in the precise sense that the latter provided the ethnic identity with the rules of validation.

But how comes it that Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, although a closed society, turned out to be a promising land for the Gurage? The answer is obvious: being a minority group, they were unable to question the monopoly of power, so that ruling elites of Ethiopia could tolerate them. A larger group would have certainly aroused protective measures on the part of the ruling ethnic group. Besides, the Gurage were most active in the domain of commerce, despised by the larger groups. Even so, the case is instructive enough to show how the process of modernization should proceed. Modern Ethiopia would be a society giving the same opportunity to larger groups, assuming that they develop the same business ethos. One way of developing this ethos is, precisely, to submit ethnic loyalty to the requirement of impersonal rules flowing from the larger and transcendent collectivity. Only the approval of a normative nation can foster the much-needed ethos of worldly validation. In the conception of a normative nation, whereby ethnic, religious, and individual idiosyncracies are put to the test of mundane victory, may lie the secret of the culture change leading to the modernization of Ethiopia.

Let it be said at once that this theory of modernization has not the slightest connivance with the policy of the current government of Ethiopia. The policy dictated by the dominant party (the EPRDF) prides itself on solving the "national question" in Ethiopia by the principle of self-determination whereby nationalities, short of secession, would agree to remain within the Ethiopian state because they are allowed to manage their own

affairs. To say that ethnic groups should develop competitive relations under the supervision of impersonal criteria is one thing, to advocate their confinement behind ethnic borders is quite another. Though the policy is presented as a new democratic organization, as "a new unity in diversity,"³⁰ just what unity means in this context is wooly, to say the least. If it signifies the generation of common and objective rules, the constitution of ethnic borders is irrelevant. If it is not, the word unity is devoid of meaning.

Moreover, since the policy encourages rather than counters the rise of ethno-nationalism, the way to the generation of impersonal rules is blocked more than ever before. As is already palpable, the policy can only spread ethnic clientelism with all the vices of favoritism, nepotism, corruption, and anti-competitiveness. The practice of office allotments according to ethnic percentage already shows to what extent merit has ceased to be even a criterion. How can people so shrouded in ethnic mentality and environment develop the need for impersonal rules? In furthering ethnic rituals, favoritism, interethnic animosity, the scheme does no more than refute the urge for rational methods. Assuming that it is not a disguised way of replacing Shewan dominance by a Tigrean one, its erosive effect on Ethiopian unity cannot be denied, any more than its straying away from the path of modernity can be contested. And failure to modernize will only exacerbate the inherited problems, and so the threat to Ethiopian unity.

THE OROMO VARIABLE

The theory advocating the rapprochement between peoples, on the grounds that it is likely to give birth to universalist values and syncretic attitudes, is further justified if the peoples share common traits beyond their differences. Among Western scholars, Levine has made a serious attempt to found Ethiopian unity not merely on the fact of conquest, but also on attributes shared by all the peoples of Ethiopia, whether they are from the north or the south. These common attributes are: A common history resulting from "a continuous process of interaction of the differentiated Ethiopian peoples with one another."³¹ Stemming from "trade, warfare, religious activities, migration, intermarriage, and exchange of special services,"³² these relations were active long before Menelik's conquest. Cultural ties: due to "the existence of a number of pan-Ethiopian culture traits,"³³ in addition to Christianity and Islam, which also cut across ethnic

differentiations. These traits are related to the conception of deity, ritual practices, food taboos, the cult of masculinity, and aspects of social organization. These ties are, according to Levine, important enough to dismiss the view opposing the Semites of Ethiopia to other Ethiopian peoples. A "characteristic mode of response to the periodic intrusion of alien peoples and cultures,"³⁴ which is neither rejection nor slavish adherence, but an attempt at syncretism, inserting borrowings into an indigenous scheme.

These common traits notwithstanding, Levine discovers significant differences, especially between the two major ethnic groups, the Oromo and the Amhara. He writes:

Where the Amhara system is hierarchical, the Oromo is egalitarian. Where the Amhara is individualistic, the Oromo is solidaristic. Where religious and political functions are segregated in Amhara institutions, for the Oromo they are fused. Where the Amhara historical project is to build an empire, that of the Oromo is to maintain a parochial tradition.³⁵

So sharp are these oppositions that in the end one wonders whether there is any common trait left. Moreover, Levine's insistence on the syncretic character of Ethiopian mentality renders the persistence of these conflicts inexplicable.

It seems as though Levine has committed a methodological error in trying to detect first the common traits and then the antagonisms. He should have begun with the syncretic reality, particularly as he recognizes the existence of common features. Protracted interactions, especially the early penetration of the Oromo into the north, compel the admission of a long process of mutual assimilation from which a syncretic national culture must have grown. As pointed out by Asmarom Legesse,

the question therefore arises as to how and to what extent the cultures of Northwest Ethiopia, which are normally thought of as the core of the ancient Christian empire, were in fact shaped under the influence of Oromo society.³⁶

A good illustration of this influence is the case of the Wollo Oromo. Seeing the political and social influence of the Wollo dynasty, the view that the Oromo were simply absorbed unilaterally into the Amhara culture is hardly defensible. Even if Amhara chauvinism tries to conceal the fact, the pro-

cess must have been mutual, that is, syncretic. Given that there are no places in Amhara region where the Oromo did not settle and interact, just as there are few places in Oromo region where the Amhara did not settle following Menelik's conquest, the Wollo case can be generalized. What Levine calls the Amhara and the Oromo are already, with the exception of some remote areas, a single syncretic reality, for neither exists in its purity. So much is this true that the attempts now made by ethno-nationalism to define a distinct and pure Oromo personality appears as an archaeological discourse, even to its supporters. Outside a linguistic distinction, about which much remains to be said, the attempt to sunder the Oromo from the Amhara is not very successful. A further reason why it is not is that a similar reality is found in the north without any attempt being made to deny the existence of a common cultural identity. Indeed, other than the linguistic difference, a line of demarcation between the Amhara and the Tigre can scarcely be drawn. So it is with the Oromo in many parts of Ethiopia, however surprising it may be in the light of the recentness of Menelik's conquest.

So the decisive question is no longer whether the Amhara and the Oromo had different cultural origins (which is a truism), but what forces of their respective culture worked towards the realization of such a rapid assimilation. The answer to this question may indicate how the syncretism has reinforced the impersonalization of Ethiopian culture, and hence its potential for modernization. For the two peoples to interact so successfully, they must have abandoned much of their exclusiveness and focused on their common traits.

Thus, at the religious level, there is indeed much to discuss. Levine remarks that "nearly all the peoples of Greater Ethiopia believe in a single supreme deity."³⁷ Put concisely, neither Christianity nor Islam introduced monotheism in Ethiopia. To be sure, most African religions explain the creation and destiny of the world by a supreme deity. However, there is a difference, since, unlike the African tradition, the Oromo do not seem to have practiced what is known as the cult of ancestors. Even if they once did, they must have abandoned it on the way. For most traditional African religions, the Supreme Being is so remote that prayers and cults are addressed to ancestors. This orientation overlaid with closed-lineage religions the otherwise universalist conception of deity in Africa. Studies of the traditional Oromo religion do not mention the cult of ancestors. Not that the Oromo did not believe in lesser spirits, but because these spirits

were not lineage-bound and were said to dwell indifferently in persons, animals, and plants. Above all, prayers and cults were directly addressed to *Waqqa*, the Oromo name for God. For instance, a prayer says:

O *Waqqa*, you do not say 'no' to those who call your name;
O *Waqqa*, you do not withdraw from those who lean on you.³⁸

Nowhere is it stated that one must be Oromo to address this prayer and to expect being heard by *Waqqa*. Still less is decisive activism refused to *Waqqa*, for as "the creator of all things,"³⁹ he has full power.

Like most African groups, the Oromo traced their origin back to a common ancestor and had a unilateral kinship organization. Going back ten generations, the importance of kinship is such that "many of his [the Oromo's] privileges, his rights, his duties, his seniority position, and his social identity are embedded in the lineage."⁴⁰ Even so, the corresponding religious ideology is not based on lineage and does not invoke the cult of ancestors. This character induces one to say that Islam and Christianity were less external impositions on Oromo religious belief than natural developments. The slightest contact was enough for Oromo religion to merge with Christianity and Islam, almost by following its own logic. Sad to say, what ethno-nationalism wants to achieve in the name of Oromo identity is the locking of this open mentality.

Another remarkable aspect of the religious belief is the similarity of the Oromo sense of piety to that of northern Ethiopia. Traditional Ethiopian religiosity was, we know, totally impregnated with the sense of utter dependence on God, fervently expressed by the belief in *idil*. Oromo religious belief too exhibits a deep sense of dependence on *Waqqa*. "Indeed, to them, sin is first of all and fundamentally an act by which man takes his fate in his own hands, thus denying his total dependence on *Waqqa*,"⁴¹ says Bartels. We need not go very far to encounter the Ethiopian railing against arrogance. Nor is the Oromo equivalent of *idil* hard to find. Termed *ayana*, it expresses the "individual character of his [the individual's] fate,"⁴² and "every child is given his own *ayana* by *Waqqa* It is his own personal *ayana*, not that of his father and mother."⁴³ Not only do the Oromo have, as in northern Ethiopia, the sense of individual life jutting out from lineage identification despite the prevailing solidaristic outlook; they have also a personal relationship of dependence on God, which is materialized as fate or *idil*. Since *ayana* results from this dependence, it can indeed be "translated by luck or good fortune."⁴⁴

Probably the original meaning of *ayana* did not correspond to that of *idil*, but this correspondence was inscribed in the cultural encounter of the Oromo with the north. This encounter could not but tend towards convergence of meaning and syncretism through the alteration of original meanings and the reinforcement of some common aspects to the detriment of discrepant ones. May it not be assumed, then, that many of the beliefs and practices of Ethiopian Christianity and Islam that do not tally with the original models are due to Oromo influence? Inversely, the Amhara influence must have eroded Oromo lineage ideology by fortifying its individualistic and universalist traits. Just as the study of the Era of the Princes shows how the rise of a Wollo dynasty revived the tribal identity of the Amhara, who found themselves vying with the Oromo for political supremacy, so too, under the influence of the Amhara, Oromo tribal and subtribal identities are regarded "today merely as regional designations."⁴⁵

Paradoxical as it may sound, what is now called Oromo nationality is the replica of Amhara identity such as it changed through Oromo pigmentation. If the two peoples still fail to recognize their common identity, it is less a question of incompatibility than of power struggle. It is worth noting that the dichotomy of the north—essentially linguistic, between Amhara and Tigre—is reproduced in the south. The maintenance of this linguistic pluralism confirms that the syncretism of Ethiopian identity is always determined by regional power struggle aiming for the renewal of ruling elites, which is a function of survival. This linguistic pluralism against the background of cultural identity is what ethno-nationalism misconceives by making it signify separate identity instead of grasping it as a cultural structure of Ethiopia designed to keep alive the power struggle. So nothing is more mistaken than the venture of substantiating a one-sided absorption of the Oromo in Amhara culture. The Amhara have changed as much as the Oromo since the two cultures met: from the start both headed for syncretism according to the Ethiopian way of integration.

Can the same view be held concerning social and political organization? The Oromo organization, known as the *gada* system, was totally unknown in northern Ethiopia. Much of the inspiration and organizational principles of the *gada* system recall the principle of age-sets which was current among the peoples of the Horn.⁴⁶ The system divided the tribal group into age-grades or *gadas*, each lasting usually for a fixed period of eight years. Definite social functions, competence, and authority were attached to each age-grade so that the system amounted to a genera-

tional promotion of members to economic, military, political, and ritual responsibilities. Though hierarchical relations ruled the age-grades, the fact that all members of *gadas* passed together through all the grades established a generational sequence of promotion. The organization was therefore "a highly democratic system" and "the extreme opposite to that of the monarchical and hierarchical Amharas."⁴⁷ The democratic character was further enhanced by the right granted to each age-set to elect leaders from among its members and dismiss them at any time. Moreover, the grouping according to age-grades emphasized group solidarity and social responsibility more than family bonds and authority. In short, the system was "neither gerontocratic nor authoritarian."⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the *gada* system has been accused of a number of shortcomings—for instance, that it stifled individualism in favor of group solidarity. Though it encouraged war and warlike values by the ritual requirement to go to war every eight years, it did not "extend political dominion"⁴⁹ over conquered lands. Inspired essentially by ritual considerations and incidentally by prospects for booty, raids rather than conquest were the goal. Only when the growth of population created the need for new land did the Oromo resolve to expand. Even then, it was not a conquest but a search for new land resulting in dispersed settlements. The explanation for this political dispersal is the restriction of individuals and social life to lineage and age-based organization. Both by its ideology and principle of organization, the *gada* system could not but induce a spirit of disunity and fragmentation.

Given these characteristics, the *gada* system seems to stand far apart from the northern social and political system. Neither the hierarchical and authoritarian social fabric of the northern system, nor its class organization, far less its imperial system and nationalist ideology resonate with the Oromo system. Yet this categorical statement suffers from obvious factual shortcomings. For instance, the *gada* system has produced a hierarchical society in a spontaneous manner in many places. Though some authors⁵⁰ claim that Menelik's conquest destroyed the *gada* system and some Oromo scholars support the thesis just to give credence to the idea of the outsider disrupting a native organization, facts indicate that the drive towards hierarchical, even monarchical systems took place before the conquest. Such was the case of the states known as "the Gibe states," which "developed by internal processes."⁵¹ Internal economic transformations and subsequent social changes, the introduction of Islam, and the need to protect

commercial interests explain the rise of the states with their class structure. So internal was the advancement towards a monarchical system that

the *Moti*, or *Abba Dula*, who in the past had been just a war leader during the cycle of his *Gada*, acquired more and more authority until his title came to mean something very close to the Ethiopian *negus*.⁵²

The question of whether the rise of monarchical states was due to a borrowing from the northern system is not important so long as the evolution is ascribed to internal needs. What is important is rather the transformation of the *gada* system into a social organization reminiscent of the northern system under the pressure of internal needs. The internal growth of a monarchical institution from the *gada* system establishes a deeper convergence with the northern system. We can even say that the Oromo system was covertly heading towards the northern model. It waited for a unifying leader and ideology. These came from the north, almost by default, so that Menelik's conquest was not so much an external imposition as a response to an inner requirement. Suppose that instead of Menelik an Oromo leader had emerged: the unification of the dispersed Oromo tribes would probably have created a system similar to that of the north by absorbing traditional Ethiopia. Whether we situate the departure of the conquest in the south or in the north, the fact is still that it was inevitable and bound to assume a similar character. To speak of the Oromo tendency to expansion is to recognize that they were animated by the same ethos of expansion as the people of northern Ethiopia. What the latter had, namely firearms and a nationalist ideology, only provided a kind of framework for the expansionist tendency and encounter of the two peoples. The only power able to prevent the realization of the integration was European colonialism. Hence the importance of Menelik's victories in the fulfillment of an indigenous process of integration.

But this is not all that there is to be said. Despite its hierarchical and authoritarian nature, the northern system, we insisted, granted power neither to birth nor age. By tying up office to service and merit, through a different mechanism but with the same aim, the northern system maintained, just as the Oromo system did, the fluidity of leadership. The open power game was for the north what generational succession was for the *gada* system. Interestingly, the *gada* system, though African in its inspiration, had not equated seniority with power. It never developed into

gerontocracy because the final grade stipulated the social withdrawal of the elders.

May it not be conjectured, then, that the gradual integration of the Oromo, especially their entrance into military service in the imperial and regional armies and their social promotion for feats of arms, have injected more fluidity into the Ethiopian society? The important role played by the Oromo both in the southern conquest and in the defense of Ethiopia is unthinkable without the new breath introduced in the traditional system of social mobility. Their assimilation imparted greater mobility and competition to the traditional order. I cannot explain the vitality of Menelik's reign without the dynamism inserted by the integration of the Oromo into a society on the verge of complete ossification and decline owing to the after-effects of the Era of the Princes.

Common also to the northern and Oromo systems was the central place of warlike values. Admittedly, both "lay tremendous stress on the virtues of aggressive masculinity. In both societies boys are trained to be fearless fighters."⁵³ Just as we cannot account for the survival and expansion of Ethiopia without a persistent fighting spirit, so can we not explain the Oromo expansion over a large territory without the same ethos. Agreed, the Oromo expansion had not the thrust of political dominion, being but ritual. But the ritual may explain the cycles of war, not the expansion as such. As a source of booty and a search for new lands, war was actually "economic in character."⁵⁴ It was also an opportunity for acquiring individual reputation, since the election of war leaders depended on achieved personal merit and courage. Even if this warlike ethos did not institute a hierarchical society as in the north, the stipulation of a war cycle by the *gada* system made war into an emanation of the social fabric itself. This way of inscribing war in the social order recalls the northern system. In both systems, war was not circumstantial or occasional, but part of the social order and movement.

The prospect of social promotion through military service accelerated the integration of the Oromo into the Ethiopian society, just as the expectation of military service explains the greater overture of the Ethiopian system to the Oromo. The social foundation of the two systems acted like a magnet, not to mention the enhancement of the Oromo ethos of war by the imperial system. Under the aegis of the Ethiopian state, the ritual and economic character of war was adorned with a nationalist connotation. Nothing could better illustrate the translation of Oromo warlike ethos into

nationalism than the way an early patriot of Oromo origin explains the reason why he joined the fight against the Italians:

What made me start the fight against the Italians is not so much that I had pondered over the disaster brought by the enemy on our country, as many patriots did, but rather that, as I was told by my relatives, I wanted to become a fighter and hero like my grandfather and great-grandfather . . . This pursuit of fame and glory having changed rapidly into nationalism, the assaults of enemy troops began to pain me.⁵⁵

More than conquest, then, the deep value attraction between the two social systems explains the integration of the Oromo.

Another affinity between the northern and Oromo social systems is the association of status with social responsibility. In our study of the Ethiopian traditional fabric we saw how the *rist* system maintained the communal character of land ownership. This form of ownership compelled ruling elites to have recourse to tax rights rather than private holdings to extract surplus. The extraction was binding status and wealth with the fulfillment of military and administrative obligations. The *gada* system too defined the age-sets in relation to specific social and political functions. Even though the northern system arranged the functions according to a social hierarchy while the Oromo system distributed them according to generational sequence instituting a more egalitarian access, the logic of subordinating social status to the discharge of social responsibilities was common to both. So long as the Ethiopian society did not introduce private property, wealth and status signified less private distinction than social responsibility. The same principle but with a wider social participation was found in the *gada* system. The difference introduced by the practice of election, which was unknown in the north, is somewhat reduced if we recall that in the north leaders were nominated by their merits as well as by their local support.

Agreed, the northern system was in no position to achieve as large a consensus as the *gada* system. But the latter also had its own political shortcomings. In particular, its egalitarian principle prevented it from having a continuity of leadership. The generational system of power devolution, undoubtedly democratic, was not suited for the realization of grand designs. Great political achievements in the world were due to the rise of great men who had enough time to materialize their historical projects. When for instance the Oromo system produced a leader of the stature of

Gobena, what he could do was extremely limited. Because he could not be elected once his cycle had expired, he had no other choice than to make "his 'expert' services available to Menelik," for which "he was amply rewarded with large *gult* rights."⁵⁶

Put otherwise, great possibilities can emerge if the northern and Oromo systems are allowed to correct their respective deficiencies by a syncretic development, the Oromo system supplying the democratic principle of election and dismissal of leaders and the northern system the power game and its continuity. This is no speculation since the reality of reciprocal contribution rendered the alliance of Gobena with Menelik possible. Interestingly, the attraction is replete with the possibility of generating modern values. We shall not follow P. Baxter when he writes:

To argue that *gaada* could be revived and used as a modern political system seems to me as fanciful as suggesting that the United Kingdom could return to rule by the monarch, House of Lords and an unreformed Commons.⁵⁷

The argument is indeed spurious: it ignores the continuity existing between modern British political and social system and its traditional root, just as it neglects the actuality of the cultural disposition of the Oromo to egalitarian and democratic principles as well as the force of the impulse to identification. If one is to deny this disposition, then there is no point in speaking of the Oromo. On the other hand, since revival means development, the issue is to know which elements can impart a modernizing impact to the inherited culture.

In studying the appeal of ethnicity, we noted that what moves ethnicity away from modernity is less its traditional reference than its embedded communalism. The latter fails to agree with the notion of competitive, individualistic, and achieving society. The way out, we suggested, is the generation of impersonal rules, the development of "national symbols . . . that are not associated with any particular cultural groups in the society" and which foster "meritocratic, 'ethnically colour-blind' values."⁵⁸ Precisely, Ethiopia provides the impersonal framework able to shape traditional personalities into modern longings.

Indeed, the integration into Ethiopian nationhood is nothing short of the acceptance of the jurisdiction of impersonal rules over a revived ethnic identity. The revival is as necessary as the integration, since without the former the impact of integration (and hence of modernization) would be

greatly diminished. Just as the free market and political pluralism enabled the West to be ruled by universal norms, so the necessity of pluralism and integration is the way Ethiopia can foster modern values. The importance of the Oromo in Ethiopia makes the process of change all the wider. There is no way by which Ethiopia can change unless it shows greater openness to a revived Oromo identity, for in so doing it will simply be evolving universalist values and methods of work. In sum, the problem of its modernization boils down to a genuine form of national integration. Only when the Oromo together with the other Ethiopian peoples knuckle down to the task of creating a new transethnic, national identity, can impersonalization, so vital for modernization, take root.

Likewise, the importance of the Oromo and their democratic disposition place Ethiopia on the threshold of modernity. Their number and widespread infiltration greatly enhance the democratic potential of Ethiopia, turning the revival of the *gada* spirit into a positive internal stimulation. However, whereas the principles of power rotation and election of leaders can provide a basis for a modern political system, the principle of age-sets is definitely not in tune with modernity. But consider the northern system, which knows no election while being culturally hooked on elite leadership. The syncretic development of the two cultural trends is liable to produce a meritocratic society through the corrections of their mutual deficiencies. The sense of elite leadership will be maintained, but on the basis of election and accountability whereby the social system is rendered even more mobile. From the background of an egalitarian system, a system of elites with accountable leadership would thus emerge.

Along the same lines, it has been stated that northern individualism falls short of being achieving because it lacks sufficient communal inspiration. From the viewpoint of modernity, group solidarity is as important as individualism. For instance, class solidarity, without which a modern democratic system is not possible, cannot function outside a minimum sense of group solidarity. Ethiopian trade-unions and professional organizations always fail to organize successful protests because the group solidarity is eroded by vertical appeals seducing individual ambitions and interests and splitting the leadership. The revival of the Oromo sense of group solidarity is then imperative in the organization of modern society in Ethiopia. But it must be modernized, notably by shaking off its generational and kinship ethos in favor of modern impersonal groups, such as classes and professional organizations.

What injunction other than the supra-ethnic consciousness can obtain such a transformation? Under the patronage of Ethiopian nationhood, the Oromo sense of group solidarity can develop into modern forms of association, just as through the infusion of the Oromo spirit northern individualism can learn the rules of modern society. The value of modern individualism, which defines personal identity and interests by reference to anonymous, impersonal groups, can emerge from the syncretic development of the two cultural trends. The outcome will be different from the vertical relations of the north as well as from the horizontal solidarity of the Oromo. But it corresponds to what the two can achieve if only they move towards mutual impregnation. The modern significance of this individualism is further confirmed by the spirit of enterprise. As implied in the terms cooperation and organization, there is enterprise when individual talents and ambitions enter into the service of collective methods and goals.

In closing, the difference between this syncretic approach and the theory of acculturation must be emphasized. Acculturation is fruitless because it assumes that the recipient culture borrows alien elements to the point of being distorted and absorbed by the donor. So radical is the loss of identity implied in this process that the recipient culture can only emerge as a pale, shrivelled imitation of the model. Underdevelopment, we suggested, is just this loss of identity. By contrast, consider what the theory of syncretism proposes to do. It does not intend to provoke cultural change by means of external borrowings. It rather speaks of convergence through a reorganization of the cultural setup whereby drives hitherto suppressed are reanimated. In thus actualizing suppressed elements by rearranging the cultural system, it visualizes the possibility of an internal, self-induced, and creative process of change. Concerning Oromo culture, the best way is then not to externally inculcate individualism, but to arrange the cultural system in such a way that individualism grows from the communal background. The same with the northern culture: it must develop the sense of group solidarity from a type of individualism fitting into cooperative relations. The motive which can push these cultures towards this kind of change is none other than the injunction of Ethiopian nationhood, which is then the ultimate answer to the why of culture change.

Like natural resources, cultural assets need to be exploited. However, the mode of exploitation differs. Natural resources are exploited by human labor and technology, which are deliberate material acts. Not so with culture, whose change is neither mechanical nor deliberately provoked. But

the main motive for cultural change can be guessed: pertaining to identity, the ethos of culture is survival and self-affirmation. Therefore, change is likely to occur if danger threatens the cultural identity. Change is then a way of responding to an internal or external challenge; it is propelled by the need for renaissance, which, as such, strives for greater affirmation and deepening of the traditional mentality. A positive drive towards modernity cannot be conceived of outside of this general path.

This path is now open for Ethiopia because of ethnic dissents, which are the products of its own failure to modernize. Its survival depends on its ability to revive its traditional plastic identity through insemination by its own failings, thereby moving towards greater universalism. It so happens that this move is what ethnicity needs in order to get rid of its idiosyncrasy and nurture objective criteria. This coincidence of ethnic needs and the national interest is called modernization. Traditional longings gratify according to objective, impersonal criteria, the framework of which is provided by Ethiopian nationhood. The traditional supra-ethnic identity is revived and modernized by assuming the function of impersonal arbitration, while traditional identities find in this arbitration modern rules and methods of self-assertion. This theory of modernization is indeed rooted in the desire to return to the source. It simply adds that this return must also collect and integrate the road already covered, with all its failures and mistakes. Only thus can it emerge into an all-out convergence, for the more integral the return, the greater will be the impersonalization.

THE SOUND OF A NEW *KIBRE NEGEST*

With respect to the relation between Islam and Christianity in Ethiopia, a similar process of integration appears feasible. Being on the same level, the way towards modernization is the same for both. For if modernity is the acceptance of impersonal rules, neither of the two religions can come closer to it without developing a militant form of mutual tolerance and respect. The way they treat each other reveals their respective degree of impersonalization. If they do not go out of their narrowness, neither can they move towards universalism, the typical form of modern nationalism. When the adherents of the two religions no longer expect partiality and manage on their own, then they concede to express their faith through worldly conquest rather than through the establishment of an Islamic state or Christian theocracy. In that case, they do coexist peacefully, but most

to Islam. Ethiopian Christianity is a good illustration, just as the ordeals through which Europe had gone before being able to separate the religious from the secular is a strong case in point. Regardless of its particular dogma, every religion is imbued with the desire to legislate for the total life of human beings. Because of this, secularization has always been the product of a deep change in the faith itself. I see no reason why Islam should be an exception, even if Islamic fundamentalism is more vociferous. Anyway, modernization will not take place so long as secularization is not saluted.

Regarding Ethiopia, there are additional reasons for being optimistic. Actually, the mere impossibility of the naturalization of Islam in Ethiopia is little substantiated. The attitude of the Christian state and Christian community has certainly contributed to this effect. Though the political system has excluded Muslims, it has never cultivated, with few exceptions, a policy of systematic persecution. Rey even finds it remarkable that

in spite of the bitter religious warfare in which they have been engaged for centuries Abyssinians should be so tolerant of their age-long enemies and should allow them to profess their faith openly as they do.⁶³

This protracted practice of tolerance does not allow the depiction of the relationship between Christianity and Islam in terms of mere conflict. The tolerance is a cultural disposition capable of being developed further.

Nor should one underestimate the fact that in Ethiopia Islam has not so far put on any fanatical or fundamentalist veneer despite some legitimate grudges. The Arab influence has not been so important; what is more, Islam has absorbed many local traits and customs to the extent of glittering with a native color. Just as with Ethiopian Christianity, "there has been a symbiosis between this [pre-Islamic] sediment and Islam."⁶⁴ The power of Ethiopian syncretism, whereby borrowed elements are greeted according to traditional canons, also pervades Islam. Syncretism has all the more enhanced the naturalization of Islam as Islamic faith and Ethiopian religiosity extol a similar form of piety. Very much like Islam, Ethiopian religiosity stresses the sense of absolute dependence on and submission to God.

More importantly, the mutual tolerance of the two religions is enshrined in the very tradition of Islamic faith, since "Ethiopia was spared the *jihad* . . . in recognition of the asylum that Aksumite kings had given to some of Muhammed's exiled followers."⁶⁵ There is much to elaborate on in this

exceptional treatment. The more the mutual tolerance of the two communities is religiously sanctioned, the easier will be the way to modernization.

Besides, this problem of integration is far from being the exclusive concern of Ethiopia. The coexistence of Islam with other beliefs is now an issue worrying the world at large. Since recourse to the *jihad* or crusade to resolve religious disparities can no longer be envisaged, the world is really obliged to come up with an original and feasible solution whose characteristic must be to accommodate the growing acceptance of religious freedom. What makes the Ethiopian case interesting is that the problem is not posited in terms of a majority tolerating a minority, but in terms of two major religious forces facing each other. In thus being a testing-ground, Ethiopia's success or failure in evolving an original form of tolerance and integration may foreshadow what the future holds in store for the world.

There is therefore need for a new *Kibre Negest*, one defining Ethiopian identity in such a way that it includes the Muslim community. This definition must not put aside the myth of the guardianship of Christianity. Rather, from ascription the myth must grow into an achieving ethos in line with the requirement of modernization. This means that the Ethiopians must prove that they are worthy of God's election through hard work and worldly success. As they cannot accomplish this new mission without fostering impersonal values, the exigency enables the inclusion of the Muslim community.

The integration, it follows, is no longer reduced to mere tolerance or equality before the law: it must devolve the sense of election on the Islamic community as well through the bequest of the cultural norms. For Ethiopian Muslims to carry the burden of election, the condition is a deep change in both beliefs. The condition is met when both religions start seeing each other less as exclusive than as different expressions of the same but unfathomable mystery of God. So, the two expressions can compete, but in line with modern standards. Whereas none can impose its truth on the other, each can and must try to validate its claim through the production of wealth. Election is no longer a given; it must be merited. Thanks to this enlargement of the notion of guardianship, election is no longer how the Christian community survives to the detriment of the Islamic community, but how both communities are pressured into a state of mutual emulation. In thus refurbishing the notion of election, this hermeneutics derives modernity from the heart of Ethiopian religiosity.

None of what is required to renew the founding myth of Ethiopian society is implausible. So long as the religious fervor is high in Christian and Muslim communities, such kind of renewal is within reach. The nature of the change is internal and does not require anything other than a greater degree of impersonalization, otherwise called secularization. While the norms of cultural change are respected, there is no reason why what became possible elsewhere would be impossible in Ethiopia.

To activate its birth, the new *Kibre Negest* must also strengthen the feeling of election with an act of glory: the survival of Ethiopia from colonialism. As the sole country which was not only spared, but which had actually resisted and defeated colonialism—that ineffaceable scar on the greater part of humankind—Ethiopia has every reason to feel unique and to use this uniqueness to revive its traditional sense of divine election. Inasmuch as the resistance against colonialism and the defeat of the Italians were the result of the unity of African peoples realized by the southern march, there is also ample ground for a deep-seated sense of national unity. The greater the uniqueness, the more pressing is the need to come up to expectations, and the more harrowing becomes the acknowledgement of failure. From this distress should grow a vigorous will to renaissance. So long as the Ethiopian sense of myth is preserved and the ground for new myths is fertile, the will to renaissance can overcome all the impediments, be they internal or external.

CONCLUSION

The last chapter endeavored to demonstrate the feasibility of a theory of modernization advocating a return to the source. In addition to being based on theoretical and factual considerations, such a theory is supported by the pragmatic wisdom advising the maintenance of proven practices. If the analyses of this study are correct—that is, if the failures and decline of Ethiopia are caused by its estrangement from tradition—then I see no other way to redress the mistakes and achieve a renaissance than through the resurrection of the dead.

To be sure, the ideological rejection of this nostalgic thesis is very easy so long as one refuses to understand that many of the problems can never be solved unless the tendency to treat Ethiopia as a laboratory comes to a halt. Indeed, the temptation seems irresistible: the greater the discrepancy between the proposed theory and the past, the higher appears to be its power to resolve inherited problems. The revolutionaries of the 1960's and 70's reasoned so. Unfortunately, those who now control Ethiopia make the same mistake by creating an even deeper fissure between what Ethiopia is and what it ought to be.

The hidden intentions of the EPRDF's ethnic policy aside, there is no doubt that the direction in which Ethiopia is currently being pushed is only another exercise in inviting adventures whose consequences cannot be predicted except for their inevitable perilousness. Mention should also be made of the uncertainty surrounding the socioeconomic policy of the EPRDF. Apart from the ethnic policy and the determination to cling to power at all costs, the impression of a visual navigation is hard to dismiss. Worse, both the fear of being a minority and the inability to resist the pleasure of revenge seem to inspire a policy of refusal. Generally speaking, the thinking is backed by what can be called seclusionism, which is a policy of sequestration of people behind ethnic, religious, and linguistic borders, including residential areas. Though the justifying ideology is self-determination, the erection of these internal walls does not appear as anything other than a system designed to perpetuate the rule of a minority.

Likewise, the present attitude towards the issue of land appears to have no other purpose than to stifle revival, yet clearly understood as mundane, economic conquest by Ethiopian elites, especially of Amhara origin. More than other ethnic groups, loss of power has plunged the Amhara elite into the bitter experience of "withdrawal of status respect," which, we know, is propitious for the birth of achieving mentality. Seeing the importance of this elite, a course of action aimed at preventing its evolution can only be detrimental to the transformation of Ethiopia in general.

The harmfulness of the EPRDF's policy notwithstanding, restorationist elements do lie heavy on its vision. The Aksumite legacy has always inspired the Tigrean provincialism, fed on its rebellious attitude to the Amhara domination and state centralization. This same legacy defined the goal of the Tigrean uprising against the Derg and sustained its combative mood. In other words, if we combine the Oromo search for self-assertion and the Amhara longing for resurgence with the Tigrean restorationist drive, the picture of Ethiopia heading for an all-out revival of its cultural forces becomes patent. There remain the objective criteria for the validation of these aspirations.

This book has tried to show that these multiple forms of revival can be healthy only if they are changed into modernizing forces under the aegis of Ethiopian nationhood, which alone can provide the objective background by its very transcendence. Revenge and reversal do not constitute a ruling vision, still less a policy of development. A vigorous modernization being the only way out, the hope of the writer is that the sight of the path should arouse the wanting will, even if the present government has so far demonstrated its lack of enlightened inspiration by taking measures opposed to the proposals contained in this essay.

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INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER ONE

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